Table of Contents

1. Prologue
2. Chapter One
3. Chapter Two
4. Chapter Three
5. Chapter Four
6. Chapter Five
7. Chapter Six
8. Chapter Seven
9. Chapter Eight
10. Chapter Nine
11. *Chapter Ten
12. Chapter Eleven
13. Chapter Twelve
14. Chapter Thirteen (FINAL)
15. Eiplogue

Prologue

Skykit sat and watched the other kits as they played and tumbled around. He eyed them jealously. The oldest kits in the nursery were all in one litter - Bearkit, Badgerkit, Foxkit, and Wolfkit. As a matter of fact, he noted, the whole litter would become apprentices by sunset today. Everytime he tried to join in, they always ignored him, and when he asked about it, they always responded by saying that he was "too small" to play and that they didn't want "runts" to play with them. Then he would eye Foxkit and think *'What are you talking about? You don't want runts playing with you! Then look at him!'* Though he wouldn't dare say those words aloud.

He knew he was being hypocritical by even thinking that. Foxkit was taller than him, only by a little bit, but he was still taller, and Skykit himself knew that. He didn't even bother ever complaining about it to Loststar, his mother, because he knew that she would always reply saying something along the lines of 'they're just jealous.' No, they aren't jealous! He's the one jealous! They're normal kits, and he's not. He's short. Small. And he knows it's an oddity. It's exactly what outcasts him from the other kits in the nursery. Makes him different. Makes him ... strange. Weird. Like he was a freak.

And he wouldn't bother complaining about it to his father, Rockfall, either, because he was quite aware of the fact that all he would say to him was to "suck it up" or that "life isn't fair." Or even "nobody cares," which was worse than any of the other things he decided to say to him. None of them were even close to comforting, so why would he even bother responding? He'd rather be ignored than be hurt by his own father. Of course, though, he knew that, apparently, 'life isn't fair.' Which he knew was true, but from the way Rockfall put it, made it sound as if everyone should know and rot in their own misery because of it.

Skykit was the son of Loststar, whom he knew was the first ever she-cat leader of MapleClan, but didn't exactly know the whole

backstory behind it all. Why none of the other she-cats hadn't ever been made the leader of the Clan. But he never asked. He knew that when the time was right his mother could come and tell him. Or even his father, Rockfall, if need be. Not like he would enjoy it if his father told him.

However, he knew that one thing was true: he didn't care whether or not he was accepted by the rest of the Clan. He didn't care if he was different. As long as he could become a warrior of MapleClan - one of the best, perhaps, as a matter of fact - or even **the** best in the whole entire history of MapleClan, nothing else mattered. What he did not know, however, was that this path was not the destiny he was meant to follow ...

Chapter One

Skykit awoke as early as possible this day. Normally he was a late sleeper - it really wasn't like he was anticipating anything anyway, wasn't like the kits would do anything with him - but this day, this was his sixth moon! It was the day he was to become an apprentice. Not to mention that he was also, of course, hoping that maybe since he was six moons now, the other kits would play with him? Not Bearkit, Badgerkit, Wolfkit, or Foxkit, though, they were apprentices now and would wake up, having to go train, soon.

However, there were still other kits! Take Earthkit and Ravenkit, for example, some of Rosestorm's kits. They were one or two moons younger than him, he wasn't sure, he thought two, though he didn't really care. From what he could tell, they seemed pretty cool, and he would like to play with them maybe today until he had to become more responsible as an apprentice. He eyed them, seeing that they were still sleeping, coddled up next to Rosestorm. However, before he could say a word, he heard a loud voice that made all of the other cats wake up. With no doubt was it his mother and fairly new leader, Loststar.

Skykit bounded out of the nursery and over to the front of the Gathering of the Clan. They were all yawning, though, and most didn't seem as if they would be paying a lot of attention to the Meeting. He really didn't care though as long as they cheered for him whenever he became an apprentice and could take on the roles of learning how to become a warrior - hunting, fighting, climbing, stalking, tracking, patrolling ... so many duties to take care of, but they were awesome, and he didn't care about how much responsibility he'd have to be forced to take on!

Toadleap walked to the front as soon as everyone had gathered, and he stood, underneath the Highrock, right next to Firehawk, the deputy of the Clan and former mate of the so-called traitor he kept hearing about, though, for some reason, could not remember the she-cats name as of now. Normally he had a good memory, so he

didn't know why he couldn't remember anything now. Then, it all came down on him. *'Wait, why is Toadleap coming up there next to Firehawk? Normally the medicine cats will stay in the group with the rest of us? What's going on?'* He couldn't help but to think.

As Toadleap began to speak, Skykit listened, awfully dumbstruck. "Cats of MapleClan, as you know, I will not be around forever. So it's time I took on an apprentice. I have chosen a cat who has shown spirit, and intelligence. Your next medicine cat will be Skykit." Skykit couldn't believe his ears. Literally - he couldn't. He was supposed to become an apprentice, not some scrawny medicine cat apprentice!

Loststar spoke up, her eyes gleaming as she looked down at her only kit, only son. "Skykit, do you accept the post of apprentice to Toadleap?" She asked her son, watching him more closely now as she noticed he was hesitating, thinking.

"I-I ... no." Skykit spoke his mind. He couldn't help it. What was he supposed to do? Take on the job of something he didn't want to become? No, he wouldn't do that. Not if he was going to do anything about it. Loststar stared at him, blinking several times and flicking her ears, as if she was officially the one who couldn't believe her ears this time.

"I'm sorry, what?" Loststar and Toadleap both said in unision. They glanced at eachother warily before back at Skykit. The whole Clan started murming to eachother and gasping, wondering if Toadleap had depicted something wrong. Maybe Skykit wasn't meant to become medicine cat apprentice, he could hear. He sure hoped he wasn't ... not as if he didn't like Toadleap, he was one of his mother's closest friends next to Pebblerain, he just ... wanted to be a warrior instead of a medicine cat. He was just speaking his opinion, Skykit wasn't aware it would cause this much confusion and distress in the Clan.

"I said no." Skykit said blankly, his whiskers twitching. He knew that she had heard him, why had she asked him what? Then, if he could have, he would have facepawed himself. *'Of course ... she knew what I was saying, just couldn't believe her ears. Hmm ... what if I am possibly making the wrong decision? But Loststar herself always told*

me to follow my heart, not what the others around me thought I should do! Does that mean I can disobey the will of StarClan? I don't know ... ' He pondered quietly in his thoughts. He has always been a deep thinker, even if he is a kit.

"I ... Skykit, dear, you are supposed to say 'I do,' please. We are both aware that you may not like the decision, and we understand that, though sometimes, we will have to do things that we do not want to do. You may not want to become a medicine cat, and rather a warrior, though please respect mine and Toadleap's decision and oblige. StarClan sent him a message, telling for him to pick you as his apprentice. Please oblige. It is not exactly the best thing to do, disobey StarClan. They will bring their wrath down upon the whole Clan if so." Loststar stated uneasily.

Skykit grunted. "Fine, Loststar, Toadleap. If you want me to become a medicine cat against my own will so much, then I will respect your decisions and oblige, as Loststar oh, so kindly put it. I do." He said, then slumped back down on the ground, flicking his ears unhappily and lashing his short tail. Loststar nodded at him and smiled, so did Toadleap. He wasn't sure if the smile was sincere or if they were just faking it. He smiled, too. That, he was sure of, was a fake with no doubt. He hoped that they could see that - how so unhappy he was with the decision they had made, which he, quite clearly, didn't agree with very much.

Toadleap picked up on his traditional lines now. "Then at the Halfmoon, you must travel to the Starshine Pool to be accepted by StarClan before the other medicine cats." He said. Skykit sighed.

Loststar sp0ke up again now. "The good wishes of all of MapleClan will go with you." She says, then Toadleap walks over to his new apprentice and touches noses with him. Skykit, now Skypaw, though Loststar hadn't mentioned the name change, which he figured was offensive and disrespectful to *him,* raced through the gasping MapleClan cats after that was over, and straight into the medicine cat's den, which he, of course, would've rather preferred going into the apprentice's den. *'Yeah,'* he thought grimly. *'I'm so sure that the good wishes of all of MapleClan will go with me ... trust me, it doesn't seem like it.*'

Chapter Two

Skypaw "awoke" *to find that he was in the midst of a dark, dark forest ... it was nighttime, yet no stars were up? No moon ... huh. That was weird. He could understand there being no moon in the sky, Loststar had told him that was a "new moon" when he was still a young kit and had once asked about it, but no stars? No. That was impossible. The stars were always up at nighttime. It represented StarClan. Every star in Silverpelt was a dead ancestor watching over their former Clan from high up in the sky.*

Unless ... unless. No, that was impossible as well! Why would he be ... there, of all places? The Dark Forest? The Place of No Stars? Whatever it was referred to as. No, just ... no. That wasn't happening. And he wasn't going to let it. He was about to turn and somehow leave this place, when all of a sudden he heard slight rustling in the bushes, and a figure popped out. A white-ish brown cat with gleaming amber eyes approached him - there was a long scar coming from his right eye down to his neck. Skypaw tried to ignore it, though it was a tad hard when maintaining eye contact.

"Skypaw," the cat meowed. His voice sounded like metal grinding together, Skypaw noted. Splintering ice, perhaps. This tomcat was large-framed. Not fat, but muscular, his muscles bunching with every pawstep he took. Obviously this cat wasn't one to be messed with, and Skypaw couldn't help but to wonder how he ended up here. His gaze trailed down from his eyes to his body, seeing that he had multiple other similar scars forming light pink markings all over his white coat. They were all quite noticeable as well.

The cat was about to speak again, but Skypaw interrupted, "What am I doing here? I shouldn't be here! If anything, I should be in the forest of StarClan, not the forest of this forbidden place!" He saw the older cat wince and close his eyes, before slowly peeling them open once more as soon as Skypaw had finished his statements of confusion to the tomcat.

"Don't say that word," the cat growled softly.

"Huh? What word? StarClan?" Skypaw asked, confused. What was wrong with the word? Nothing, he didn't think. It represented the actual good, noble cats whom had passed away, not the dark, evil ones like this cat and everyone else who he resided in the Dark Forest, the Place of No Stars, whatever the proper name of this forbidden place really is ...

The unknown tom winced again. "Yes." He responded, then mouthed the word - StarClan - over and over. It was easy to pick up what exactly he was mimicking, and a tad bit strange. This stranger could mouth it but Skypaw couldn't say it? Yes, there was a difference, but ... he was also confused about another thing. Why was he mouthing it? From the cat's facial features, it seemed as if the only reason he was mouthing the word was just because he was trying to get a feel to it ... what? Was he unfamiliar to the word StarClan? Well, probably, considering he lived in a place that didn't even contain stars in the sky.

"Why am I here, anyway?" Skypaw asked, angry now. Why had he showed up here instead of an ordinary, regular dream? Nevertheless, if he wasn't going to have a normal dream, why couldn't he have at least ended up in StarClan?

"I am aware of how much you dislike your new career in MapleClan. You will be stuck with that job for the rest of your life, Skypaw, unless you do something about it, and quick. Now, tell me ... what is the one thing that you have always dreamed of becoming?" The cat asked.

"A warrior," Skypaw responded quickly without even the slightest hint of hesitance.

The white cat nodded, slowly, his amber eyes gleaming as he watched the cat. "Anything else?" He questioned. Skypaw glared at him questioningly, before realizing that he also wanted to become the deputy, perhaps leader sometime ...

"Um, deputy. Maybe leader one day." Skypaw answered, wondering what he would do with that information. He had heard about the fight between StarClan and the Dark Forest once before, a long, long time ago, and wondered what this cat would plan on doing with this information.

"Good," the cat nodded with agreement, his eyes shining in the ... er,

slight lightness of the forest. "You want to become a leader ... " his eyes glowed. "Ah, so rude of me!" He suddenly said. "I have forgotten to tell you my name, haven't I, young Skypaw? Well, my name is Swiftstar, leader of MapleClan before Froststar. You have heard of him, haven't you?" He asked then.

Skypaw nodded. "Yeah, of course. He was the leader before my mother." He said. The white cat smiled at the response, then suddenly frowned.

"Yeah, that's right." The cat whom claimed himself to be Swiftstar answered. "Let me tell you this, now, Skypaw - Frostsar was a weak leader. That was why he had died so early on into his leadership - after only fifteen moons of his leadership? Pathetic! It wasn't a surprise when the badgers killed him." He smirked slightly, then frowned again as if he was becoming increasingly troubled by each passing minute. Skypaw was shocked - how could this cat speak so lowly of a, from what he could tell, great leader like Froststar? Shaking his head, he decided to ignore it and get on with it all.

Everyone had their own opinions, and so, even if he thought Froststar had been a great leader from what Loststar said about him, he decided to respect Swiftstar's opinion on Loststar's precedor. "Now then," Swiftstar began again. "I suppose I can teach you a few battle moves, if you like?" He suggested, in which Skypaw happily obliged to it, nodding his head excitedly. Swiftstar smirked. "Alright then," he said. "I suppose I will start with this one. Now, mind you, it does not have a name, though I prefer to call it the Underbelly Slash ... " he said. "Are you ready?" Swiftstar asked, seemingly unsure whether he should start or not.

Skypaw nodded. "Of course," he said, then stiffened, thinking that he'd probably know how to deal with this move Swiftstar was about to do. However, before he could react, Swiftstar darted underneath his legs - how, he didn't know - and began slashing at the back of his forepaws ... with unsheathed claws. Skypaw felt the sharp pain hit his legs, though ignored it, biting his lip and waiting for Swiftstar to come out from the other side. Though he did not, and before he could react, Skypaw felt Swiftstar's curved claws hook into his left side. Shrieking with immense pain, and proceeded to drag him to the ground. All he saw before he w0ke up was

Swiftstar's heavy smirk as he looked down upon him.

Skypaw jerked awake with blood staining his side and his forepaws. His mossy nest was wet - he could feel the sick smelling blood coddled up against his body, sticking to his fur and the moss below him. He squeezed his eyes shut in pain and mewled, having never felt anything as physically painful as this before. A few minutes later, Toadleap appeared, and gasped with shock as he noticed Skypaw was bleeding severely. "Skypaw?! What happened?" Toadleap asked, rushing over to his herb storage.

"I ... I don't know." Skypaw lied. "I really don't know." Of course he knew ... he wasn't a mouse-brain. He had heard, once, that everytime you receive a wound in The Dark Forest, you also received it in real life once you awoke, and would still be capable of feeling it ... only now had Skypaw realized that whatever cat had made that up was actually being true all along. He flinched and closed his eyes as his mentor dabbed some kind of juice on his wounds before beginning to wrap them up in cobwebs.

"I was planning to take you out to tour the territory this morning, but I'm not so sure ... " he could sense Toadleap scanning his body for any more wounds before seeing the ones on his forelegs and grabbing more herbs. "That couldn't have been thorns, you know. I don't know what could have happened to you. I've never seen anything like this before in my entire lifetime." He was shocked still.

Skypaw laid his head down on the ground, flicking his ears. "I don't know what happened, either," he lied, once again to his mentor, sucking in the pain and quite clearly trying to ignore it. He heard the rustle of bushes, and then, Toadleap had left the medicine cat's den. Skypaw could tell because of the silence and the simple emptiness of the atmosphere around him.

He couldn't wait to learn another fighting technique.

Chapter Three

Toadleap, of course, being a medicine cat, had made Skypaw not go out and collect herbs ... wasn't like he would have even wanted to, anyway, though he would've enjoyed at least going outside of camp for once. Toadleap left the medicine cat den to go hunt for the herbs himself, leaving Skypaw inside of the medicine cat's den to rest and let his wounds heal. At least, he had said, that the wounds weren't *too* deep or severe, so Skypaw should be able to go out of camp in, at the most, a couple of days.

Until then, however, Skypaw knew he would be bored. Well, unless he can find something to keep him occupied. Maybe he could find a friend to talk to? *'What friend?'* He then asked himself in his head and sighed, flattening his ears against his head. He knew, though, that if he **wanted** friends, which he did, of course, then he would have to go associate with them *first,* since, apparently, they never bothered about being the first to approach him. He didn't even see why his size mattered ... besides, he's in training to become a medicine cat, now, too! So hopefully they would start treating him with the respect that he deserves. Or else Loststar would make them, he was well aware of. Or at least he hoped that she would, anyway.

Skypaw attempted to find some more apprentices to talk to. All except Bearpaw, Wolfpaw, Badgerpaw, and Foxpaw, of course. They would kill him if he even set a pawstep towards their direction. It wouldn't be a problem, either. The only fighting tactic he knew so far was the one that Swiftstar taught him, and even then, he couldn't use it on four cats at once! Great StarClan! What was he thinking? Yeah, they might get annoyed and bully him some more if he took a pawstep closer to the littermates, but they wouldn't kill him! He started wondering why he was even thinking this way. He wouldn't have thought that way before - not unless someone managed to get him, really, really mad, which wasn't exactly hard when it comes to Skypaw because he's already extremely agitated over becoming a medicine cat.

Skypaw couldn't find anyone to talk to so that they could occupy his boredom, so eventually he gave up. He headed back over to the medicine cat's den to rest, and he sighed, beginning to think. Of course, there was only a few apprentices left in camp, since most were out training with their mentors at this time. This will probably be the most irritating days of his life for awhile, what with him not having anything to do except for laying around in camp. Not going outside or anything. He sighed. The warrior apprentices were all lucky ... much luckier than him, for any reason! They didn't have to be kept inside the camp for days, nor were they required to have to hunt for herbs whenever they did get the chance to go outside!

Skypaw growled lowly at the thought of who had inflicted these wounds upon him and caused him to be forced into having to stay inside of the camp all day. He flicked his ears, and began wondering if he should tell Loststar. But then what if the next time he dreams, Swiftstar gets onto him about it and just hurts him more? He winces as he thinks about what that could feel like, getting hurt some more by a *Dark Forest cat!* He shakes his head and sighs. *'Oh well.'* He thinks. *'It'll be the right thing to do.'* He pointed out to himself in his head and sighed, pulling himself up from the ground of the medicine cat's den.

Skypaw then walked over to the leader's den, his mother's den, *Loststar's* den, and once again debated whether or not he should do this for the second time that day, with the first being just, like, three seconds ago. Literally. He shook his fur out and walked inside just to see that Loststar. Firehawk, Rockfall, Pineleaf (Pinepaw), and Pebblestream (Pebblepaw) were discussing something that seemed rather important due to the fact that they were talking in low, hushed voices. It looked as if they were having a council meeting.

Loststar looked up. "Oh, Skypaw. It's just you." She meowed, lashing her tail. "We were just talking about you." She pointed out, and the other cats besides Skypaw in the den nodded from right beside her.

"Uhh ... oka-a-a-y?" Skypaw mewed, confused. "Why were you talking about me and what were you saying?" He asked them. They looked at eachother for a minute, obviously wondering if they should answer, though then they nodded to eachother and sighed.

"Well, we were wondering how you had gotten those .. " Firehawk flicked his tail over Skypaw's wounds, making him flinch, then he pulled back. " ... wounds of yours." He finally said after a few seconds of an awkward silence for them all.

"Yes," Pineleaf added. "We know that nothing could have broken into camp or hurt you, or whatever, because we had warriors on guard." He pointed out. "We also know that thorns in your bedding could not have caused that at all." He said.

Skypaw once again debated whether or not he should tell the five cats in the leader's den about his visit to the Dark Forest the other night ... but what if he can't visit the Dark Forest again after he does it? He wants to become a warrior, and he knows that Swiftstar is trying to help him become one by showing him how to do these wounds, even going as far as to inflict them upon him so that he'll be capable of knowing how much damage they can cause to his opponent. Maybe if he can show them these moves, maybe then they'd understand ...

He flinched. *'No.'* He said to himself. *'They're bound to know that it isn't a regular fighting move.'* He pointed out to himself and sighed, shaking his head. Loststar and Pebblestream looked at him weirdly, though the other cats didn't seem to acknowledge what he was doing. "I ... " he came up with a quick lie. " ... don't know what could have caused these wounds, Loststar." He mewed. "It could be sickness." He quickly added as he gazed up at the warriors.

Loststar looked suspicious, though decided to at least act as if she believed her son. "I see," she meowed. "I suppose we should worry, then. We need extra guards at every entrance of camp every night, got it?" She asked, looking at Firehawk, who decided who the guards were that watched over the camp at nighttime.

Firehawk nodded, flicking his ears to show that he understood what to do. "Got it," he nodded in agreement. "Well then, Skypaw," he sighed briskly. "I think you can go now. We'll discuss some more of this later, alright?" He asked, then looked towards Loststar for the confirmation of his words, who then nodded. Skypaw nodded as well and left the den, lashing his tail behind him.

'Mouse-brain!' He thought. *'What have I just done?! Now I'll just keep on visiting the Dark Forest to have Swiftstar train me. I'll probably end up dying one of these days due to those wounds!'* He pointed out to himself, all while growling the whole time. He flexed his claws and sunk them into the earth, his eyes narrowing as he stood outside of his mother's leader's den. He pulled out his claws and padded over to the fresh-kill pile. He hadn't ate all day, so of course he'd be hungry. He pulled out a plump-ish mouse and gulped it down in a few bites, then turned and stalked into the medicine cat's den, where Toadleap was sorting away.

"Hello, Skypaw," Toadleap greeted his new apprentice with his voice muffled by the herbs he had equipped into his jaws. Skypaw couldn't tell what herbs most of them were. The only herbs that he knew Toadleap had in his mouth at the moment were cobwebs and juniper berries.

"Hi, Toadleap," Skypaw murmured quietly to his mentor. "What herbs are those?" He asked, pretending to act interested in what Toadleap was saying when he was actually much more interested in other things. One thing, was thinking about what he should do with the whole *Swiftstar in the Dark Forest* incident. The second thing he was interested in was the cute she-cat outside of the medicine cat's den, pondering what she should eat from the fresh-kill pile. Skypaw recognized her as Honeypaw, one of the Warrior apprentices. *'Stupid!'* He would've facepawed if he could. *'I'm a medicine cat. I can't have a mate or kits. Not like I'd want any, but I may want a mate! Stupid Toadleap ... Loststar ... StarClan. I don't want to be a medicine cat!'* He grunted with a low sigh and flicked his ears.

He was cut off from his thoughts as Toadleap began to explain what the herbs that he was currently carrying at the moment were called. "Well, these are juniper berries," he pointed out. "These are cobwebs," he added. "Then we have some comfrey, lavender, and borage." He stated. Skypaw nodded with a fake smile, then turned back and looked outside of the medicine cat's to continue swooning over the she-cat out there. Honeypaw.

Toadleap sighed, obviously noticing that Skypaw wasn't paying attention to anything that he had just said. He walked over. "Skypaw," he mumbled. "What are you doing? You know that, as a

medicine cat, you can't have a mate ... " he pointed out quietly. " ... or a crush, for our Clan's sake."

Skypaw growled, whipping around to glare at him. "Why can't we have a mate, first off? I didn't even ***want*** to be a medicine cat, and even Loststar knew that, but not you? Isn't StarClan supposed to tell you these things?" He growled.

"They did," Toadleap meowed. "StarClan said that you'd be a struggle - and trust me, you are." He smiled a bit, but didn't laugh or even let out a simple, loose chuckle. Skypaw didn't even react, just kept on looking him right straight into the eye. "They did, however, say, that you are the destined, future medicine cat of MapleClan. You should be happy." He meowed. "A medicine cat is a high rank. And cats will learn to respect you, unlike how they normally treated you." He added.

"Well, I'm not, Toadleap, because guess what?! They'd respect me if I was a warrior, too, instead of some weak medicine cat." Skypaw spat, then stormed out of the medicine cat's den. He began to wander if he should have done that to Toadleap. *'Yes,'* he said. *'Toadleap deserves it, and so does Loststar. Really, they deserve to be ashamed of themselves and guilty for making a poor little runt like myself be forced into something that he doesn't even want to do. It's really a cruel thing once you think about it ... '*

Chapter Four

Skypaw sat outside of the medicine cat's den and began gazing around camp. Rockfall was flirting with the other she-cats and Loststar was eyeing him, but it wasn't as if she really cared. She wasn't exactly faithful to him anyways, at least not since she had became the leader of MapleClan. She didn't have any time for an insensitive tom like him, who still thought of the toms as superior. Well, that's what she said at least. He didn't really get what the whole get-up was with toms being the more superior gender in MapleClan. He didn't see why, either. It was stupid, really.

Most of the she-cats were having to train, considering that it hadn't been too long ago that Loststar had become leader of the Clan. They had always been told to stay inside the camp before, now they could actually explore, hunt, and fight. They just weren't so experienced in the last two, not just yet. They still had to practice. Honeypaw and a couple other she-cat apprentices were lucky that they had been born right on the very beginning of Loststar's reign as a deputy. It's the same with all of the she-kits. Froststar had been growing old anyway, that was why he appointed Loststar, then Losthope, as the deputy after Stormfast died. It had only been a matter of weeks until he died and Loststar received her nine lives, as the first ever she-cat leader of MapleClan and possibly the most honored, as of now.

All of a sudden, Firehawk's voice rang out above the sound of the clearing. "Alright! The cats coming with me on Dawn Patrol is going to be Birdflight, Mistcloud, Ravencall, Milkdrop, Bloodfang, and her apprentice, Honeypaw!" Firehawk stated, and the cats that he had called came over to him. Skypaw almost shrieked. Actually, he was almost positive that a sound had escaped his mouth because now everyone was staring at him, including Honeypaw. He couldn't care less about the other cats looking at him, but*Honeypaw!* That was just plain embarrassing to him. Not to mention, he was also irked that HONEYPAW, of all cats, or just apprentices of MapleClan, could go on Dawn Patrol. She had only been an apprentice for, like,

a moon, about as long as him!

Skypaw stared at the patrol with a death glare, so they all quickly looked away. Firehawk had been about the only cat out in the clearing that wasn't staring, and his patrol were all looking at him now. With a wary glance cast at Skypaw, however, he then turned and lead the patrol out of camp. Skypaw sunk his claws into the ground and then pulled out, slinking away.

He walked over to the fresh-kill pile and picked through the prey in there, eventually pulling out a mouse that was at the very bottom. It was plump, and would probably fulfill his hunger within just a couple of bites. He doubted he could be able to eat it all. Whenever his hunger was gone, he picked up the remaining pieces of mouse - there was still quite a bit of it left - and walked over to the Elder's Den, giving it to the elders Foxheart and Thornscratch. "Thank you, Skypaw," Thornscratch said in that raspy voice of his. Foxheart was still fast asleep, as he normally was. Foxheart though, he was old. Over 100 moons old, as a matter of fact, while Thornscratch was only around 70 moons, so he wasn't very old.

Skypaw just nodded in response, then he turned and left the den. He sighed, wondering what he should do. He was still hurting from the pain of that wound Swiftstar had gave him whenever he had been dreaming, and didn't know if he'd be allowed outside of the camp because of it. Skypaw squeezed his eyes shut just at the very thought of Swiftstar, that evil old tomcat, and wondered how he had even become the leader in the first place. Certainly not because he was noble. Then he had to have appointed Froststar as his deputy ... if he thought that Froststar would've ended up becoming a pathetic leader, why did he even appoint him as the deputy? Of course, though, Froststar could hae simply changed his personality, and that could have been what made Swiftstar to hate him, or at the very least, greatly dislike him.

Skypaw frowned as he spotted Ravencall, Whiteclaw, and Rockfall having a conversation. He knew that those three weren't particularly the nicest within the Clan, and certainly, they still thought of the she-cats as inferior. Skypaw still didn't know why they had that rule in the first place. He knew quite a few great she-cats. Take Honeypaw, for example, or Cherryflower. Or Loststar.

Kind of ... he didn't like her that much anymore, not after she had appointed him as Medicine Cat Apprentice. He didn't really think he's even gotten around to learning anything from Toadleap yet. All because of that wound of his.

He wanted to learn. Well, not really, but it was boring to have to stay inside of the camp all day, and he would appreciate it if he could go outside of the camp for once. Swiftstar must have thought wrong about injuring him, because he didn't think that a cat wounding him while he slept would make him change and be deemed worthy enough of becoming a Warrior. Or Deputy. Or Leader. Either one of those ranks were perfectly fine with him. Leader, even more so ... ah! What was he thinking?! He sounded like one of those majorly ambitious cats that didn't know their place in the hierarchy of the Clans.

Skypaw burned bright red underneath his pelt as Thornscratch pointed out to him that he was still inside of the den. He flicked his ears. "Sorry," Skypaw murmured, a bit embarrassed, then he turned and proceeded to leave the Elder's Den so that Thornscratch and Foxheart could be in peace. Well, in as much peace as they could be with eachother. He had heard that Foxheart was a tad bit crazy, and, really, he couldn't help but have to believe that. Foxheart had always seemed to him and Loststar both a bit crazy in the head ...

Skypaw glanced over towards the Leader's Den, and saw that Loststar and Pebblestream were having a conversation. Firehawk was still out on that Dawn Patrol, and Pineleaf was hunting outside of the camp by himself. He took note that Rockfall, Ravencall, and Whiteclaw had all gotten up and left the camp themselves, probably to go check on the borders or hunt, maybe. He didn't know, but he didn't really trust the three for some reason. They seemed a bit ... suspicious to him. They still "worshipped" the old ways of MapleClan, treating most of the she-cats like dirt. He decided to shake off that terrible feeling in the pit of his stomach, so that his worries would and finally could cease to cease him.

Skypaw took a glance over to Toadleap, who was busy rearranging his Herb Pile to notice that Skypaw was gazing at him. Eventually, though, Toadleap did look up. He acknowledged Skypaw, but didn't say a word to him, just quickly looked down again to continue his

work. Skypaw figured that he was possibly still upset about what had happened between him and Skypaw. That argument they had just a few hours ago. Or minutes, he wasn't sure, he lost track of time fairly easily.

He looked at Cherryflower, who was close to the Warrior's Den with Rosestorm, Sunflare, and Minnowcreek. They were Warrior training, obviously, but they still shared the Warrior's den. They couldn't sleep in the Apprentice's Den because they were too big. Either that, or they would take up too much room, and the other Apprentices wouldn't be able to find a comfortable position to sleep in with them in there. Skypaw chuckled to himself a bit at the thought, which caused Sunflare to look at him weirdly. His face turned bright red again, but luckily, nobody was able to see the blush due to his pelt being on top of his flesh. And for that, he thanked StarClan.

Skypaw sighed and was about to walk over to Toadleap to apologize, but he decided against it. No, he didn't like sucking up to other cats. That simply was not his thing, really. He had never enjoyed apologizing, and didn't think he ever would, so he decided not to apologize. Not to Toadleap, not to Loststar, not to anyone. He glanced outside of camp, and padded out. Perhaps he could teach himself to hunt, or something. He sighed as he walked along the dirty ground, stepping in mud almost every other step because it had rained the night before. He didn't care, though. Skypaw just shook off the mud that clung to his pelt, though there was still some mud left on his whiskers and the tips of his fur. He didn't mind, though.

Skypaw noticed a vole, and silently went into a crouching position as he had saw other apprentices teach the other kits, but not him - no, never him, the little runt - whenever he was still just a small, tinier kit. He slowly stalked after the vole, with his tail flat against him and drooping low, but not low enough as to it brushed against the sticks or leaves on the forest floor, or got caught in tangled roots of trees or dirty in the mud. He made sure that none of that would happen. When the vole stopped moving, he took a few more steps closer, and then pounced, only to find out that the vole had escaped, and was not scrambling away towards a safe place.

With a low growl, he started to insult himself. Then, he padded closer, and spotted a squirrel absentmindedly chewing on a nut, right underneath a tree and in plain view. He decided that he should try again. The squirrel didn't notice him, so he formed another hunting crouch, this time being extra careful not to disturb the squirrel before or when he got the chance to pounce on the small, agile creature. With a soft hiss, he reached forward his paw and tried grabbing the squirrel with unsheathed claws once he got close enough, but to no avail. The squirrel climbed up the tree that it had been underneath as fast as it could, and Skypaw knew that there would be no use in chasing after it. He'd never be able to catch it, and it would only be a waste of his valuable energy.

He continued walking along the forest, wondering if there would be anything else that he could chase away with his extremely poor hunting skills. He then saw the hugest bird that he had ever been capable of seeing right before his own eyes. What was a bird like that doing on MapleClan territory, anyway, though? He asked himself. He wasn't sure if this bird was a bird of prey, or not. But the bird was just sitting there, and it seemed much too big and strong to be able to be a bird of prey. Perhaps, this bird was a predator? He was almost positive that he had heard tales of big, brown birds like these that preyed on the innocent cats below, grabbing them with their talons and then flying away to feast on them for a meal.

Skypaw shivered at the thought, and knew he wouldn't be able to catch a bird like this if he couldn't even catch a vole or a squirrel. Twice! Two times he had failed. With a low sigh of defeat and lost hope, he soon turned around, obviously giving up on ever being able to catch a decent-sized piece of prey today. However, as soon as he was about to leave, a familiar voice growled in his ear, *'Don't be stupid. This bird is a predator. If you don't catch it, then innocent cats from MapleClan will die. Do you want that to happen?'* The cat hissed in his ear.

Skypaw's eyes widened, and he turned around to see that a ghostly, black and brown figure was next to him. He recognized the cat as Swiftstar, from the Dark Forest. Had he come all the way down here just to help him with his terrible hunting skills? "N-no," he

whispered. "I don't want that to happen." Skypaw added, his eyes still as wide as ever.

"*Didn't think so,"* Swiftstar growled again. "*Now, do as I tell you, and MapleClan will be safe from harm for these few moons."* He hissed nonchalantly. Skypaw nodded, and Swiftstar smirked. *"Good."* he murmured. *"Now, get into a crouch."* he ordered, and Skypaw obeyed immediately, getting into the best crouch he could manage. *"Make it better."* he snarled, and Skypaw obeyed, making his posture straighter and more powerful than it was before.*"Good."* **he** spat, then continued. *"Much better. Now, please, stalk closer to the creature."* he stated coldly, and Skypaw nodded a bit, slowly getting closer while still somehow managing to keep his crouching posture straight and powerful, as it should be and as how Swiftstar wants it. *"Now pounce, and bite it on the neck as hard as possible!"*he ordered, and Skypaw pounced on the bird. As the bird was squeaking and squawking underneath his body, he gave it a powerful bite to the neck, as hard as he could, and that was the killing bite that he had just delivered.

The bird was dead, and now, Skypaw realized that the bird wasn't just any bird. It was a hawk! His eyes widened in surprise as his grip loosened on the hawk. "Thank you," he said to Swiftstar, as he turned his head to glance at where the much older, dark tomcat was. But he was no longer there. Right now, all he could see was the forest.
There was no Swiftstar in sight.

Chapter Five

Skypaw stared down at the limp hawk in front of his paws. "What the - ?" he whispered, quite clearly confused about what had just occurred. That cat was obviously Swiftstar. Nobody else looked like him, or had that dark atmosphere that always seemed to surround the ancient leader. Skypaw grimaced and picked the hawk up in his jaws, beginning to pad towards camp.

Whenever he reached camp, he immediately headed towards the fresh-kill pile. For some reason, he didn't want anyone to see the hawk that he had killed under the watchful yet not-wise eyes of Swiftstar. Sighing, he dropped the hawk in the fresh-kill with the rest of the prey, before turning around and seeing Honeypaw watching him. The cream-ginger she-cat was one of Milkdrop's daughters, he soon realized, and they shared a close resemblance. Honeypaw, herself, however, was closer to her mother, Berrybush, then she ever would be to her father.

Skypaw could tell that Honeypaw was rather embarrassed to be caught staring at someone, nevertheless the *medicine cat,* of all the cats that she could've been caught looking at. Finally, Honeypaw took a deep breath and walked closer to Skypaw, as he could tell that she had been dying to do. "How did you - how did you get that hawk? And since when do hawks come here?" she asked, flicking her tail.

Skypaw's ears twitched. "I-it was almost dead, so I decided to end it's misery already." he meowed, coming up with a quick lie. It would be terrible if someone discovered his meetings with Swiftstar, and if anyone had to discover that he still planned on meeting with the dark leader, it certainly wouldn't be Honeypaw, and he'd make sure of that if it was the last thing he did.

"Oh," Honeypaw said, obviously disappointed about his answer. Skypaw could tell that Honeypaw had wanted him to have had to have done something heroic to get rid of the hawk, something brave ... it was hardly heroic, what he had truly done. He just did

whatever Swiftstar had told him to do, because if he didn't, Swiftstar would've and *could've* probably killed him, anyhow.

Honeypaw looked at him some more, awkward. Skypaw wasn't sure about how to carry on this conversation. Really, the only cats that he's ever had a real, actual conversation with is Toadleap, Loststar, and Rockfall, and that was generally only because they forced him to talk to them. Honeypaw cleared her throat. "So ... how's that wound of yours doing?" Honeypaw eventually asked.

Skypaw blinked, turning his gaze down to that wound that was on his side. It had reopened, and was slightly dripping blood, but not enough so that he'd have to be required to go to the medicine cat's den. "It's been doing ... " he struggled for a word to grasp onto. " ... it's been doing good. Great, actually." he meowed, quickly leaning down and giving his side a few quick licks to wash away the blood.

Honeypaw looked unnerved by the situation. She was a popular apprentice, and had lots of friends, so she really wasn't sure about what to do whenever it came to an awkward situation, such as this one. Most of the time, she wouldn't have to worry about things like this. "How did you get that wound, anyway?" she asked, flexing her claws and sinking them into the earth.

"I'm really not sure," Skypaw had come up with this lie before, so it was easy to spill out. He looked at the sky. *'StarClan, help me ... '* he thought, though wasn't sure if they'd actually decide to pay attention to him or not ... afterall, he was still planning on visiting Swiftstar while he slept. And, that was quite clearly something that StarClan would never approve of. "I mean, I just sort of ... woke up with it this morning." That was only slightly a lie, considering that he did just wake up with the wound this morning, and he really hadn't expected that, either.

"Oh, okay." Honeypaw meowed. The conversation was still awkward, but not quite as unnerving as it was before. "So you have no idea at all how it happened?" Honeypaw asked, genuinely surprised, which Skypaw thought was strange.

"No," Skypaw meowed. "I really don't know how it happened, to be honest with you. Like I said, I'd just woken up with it this morning,

and didn't know how it happened." he said. Honeypaw had this weird twinkle in her eyes that Skypaw didn't seem to like. It made him suspicious, yet, as always, he didn't know why it did. It was just a feeling that was deep in his gut.

Honeypaw nodded again, the twinkle in her eyes disappearing for once. "Hmm ... " she turned around, to see that a few of her other apprentice friends were looking at her oddly. Skypaw knew what they were thinking; *'Why is she speaking to that weirdo, Skypaw?'* However, they would never dare to utter those words aloud. Afterall, his mother was one of the most powerful cats in the Clan, and he was a powerful cat himself, being the medicine cat's apprentice and all. "Well, I've gotta bounce ... my friends want me." Honeypaw mewed. "Bye, Skypaw. I guess I'll see you around?" she asked.

*'Obviously, considering we're both in MapleClan.'*Skypaw thought sarcastically.

"Skypaw?" he heard a voice from behind him. Of course, it was Toadleap. Who else would be saying his name so hesitantly? Whirling around ungracefully, Skypaw looked at his mentor ungratefully.

"Yes, Toadleap?" he asked as respectfully and kindly as possible, which actually wasn't very respectful and kind at all. Toadleap winced, though Skypaw didn't notice that. What Skypaw didn't know, was that Toadleap really wasn't focused on upsetting him. That wasn't what his mentor wanted to do. All he wanted to do was to help him learn how to become a righteous and true medicine cat of MapleClan, which was hard whenever you had to work with an attitude that belonged to Skypaw.

Toadleap sighed again. "Well, since your wound looks better ... " he was side-eyeing Skypaw's wound, he could tell. "... I figured that maybe we could go out and collect some herbs." he meowed hopefully. Skypaw sighed, looking down.

"Fine," Skypaw meowed. "Sounds good to me." he murmured. He wasn't as hateful to Toadleap anymore, not like he had been whenever he first became the elderly tom's medicine at apprentice.

Toadleap let out a quiet sigh of relief, and nodded, before walking outside of the entrance of camp, with Skypaw trudging not too far behind. He'd much rather be going on a border patrol with Firehawk and some other warriors rather than herb hunting with Toadleap, but this would have to do for now.

Skypaw followed Toadleap to the waterfall, and blinked as he looked around. "How would there be any good herbs at a waterfall?" he asked, confused. Toadleap turend around to look at him.

"We're low on water mint, and you can only find watermint in damp places, like this pond right below the waterfall." he pointed out. "That's why the herb is called watermint." he shrugged.

'Yeah, I figured that much about a herb called water mint.' Skypaw thought, and almost said it aloud, but bit back on his tongue. He decided that he'd cost Toadleap and, in reality, practically everyone else in MapleClan, at the very least, enough trouble for today.

"Water mint is a purple-pink flower, Skypaw. Now look along the edges of the pond for the plant, they're usually plentiful around this waterfall." Toadleap meowed, then walked away so that he could begin looking for some water mint on the other side of the waterfall. Sighing, Skypaw approached a purple-pink plant, and ripped it from the ground with his teeth. Then he tore off the roots that were still clinging onto the water mint, and dropped the flower next to a large tree so that he could come back for it later. Soon enough, he had found a whole clump of water mint, and began tearing the plants from their roots and setting them down next to the same tree.

Skypaw eventually came upon another group of herbs that were yellow, and some were white. "Toadleap!" he called for his mentor, who showed up a few seconds later. "Is this a herb?" he asked, showing him the multi-colored clump of flowery-looking herbs. Toadleap blinked.

"Yeah, that's called Coltsfoot. It helps with breathing, kitten-cough, and cracked or sore pads." Toadleap named the usage of the herbs right of the top of his head. Skypaw blinked at how Toadleap could

name the usages of a herb in five seconds flat. Then again, the elderly tom has been a medicine cat for many, many long moons, so he figured that would be easy to expect.

Skypaw then nodded and picked off a whole clump off the herbs, dropping them over next to the water mint. Toadleap then ran back over to the other side of the pond so that he could continue looking for his herbs. Frowning, Skypaw collected some more Coltsfoot and water mint from the edges of the pond, even finding some near the waterfall while he was at it. Soon enough, Skypaw discovered another strange, unfamiliar kind of herb, though he could swear that it looked a lot like Parsley. He tried picking it up in his jaws, though it was stuck hard in the ground.

Just in time, Toadleap showed up. Whenever he spotted Skypaw and saw what he was trying to pick up, his eyes became panicky. "Skypaw!" Toadleap growled. Blinking and thinking as if he had done something wrong, Skypaw looked up at his mentor, who spoke again before he could have had a chance to respond. "Never, ever put that in your mouth!" he said. Skypaw dropped the herb.

"Why not?" Skypaw asked. "It's not like I tried eating deathberries or deadly nightshade!" he complained, really confused and puzzled about what was going on now. Toadleap sighed, exasperated, though less angry and panicked now.

"That's almost as bad as deathberries!" Toadleap growled. "That's called Water Hemlock, Skypaw, and it can kill you." he pointed out. Skypaw slowly took a step back from the herb, then walked back over to the tree. Toadleap had just now saved his life, and that would be a debt that Skypaw doubted he would ever be able to repay to his mentor.

"Oh," Skypaw meowed. "Sorry, about that, then ... Toadleap." Skypaw murmured, then picked up all of the Coltsfoot and water mint that he had collected. He could barely keep it all in his mouth.

Sighing, Toadleap shook his head. "No, it's fine. It's just that you're the only apprentice I've had since Dogpaw, and I don't want you to die like he did, so early on into his apprenticeship ... " he shook his head at the mere though of his deceased apprentice, and so he

decided to drop the subject. Toadleap looked back up at Skypaw. "Anyway, I'd say that we should get back to camp. It's almost sunfall." he meowed.

Skypaw looked up at the sky. How was it almost sunfall, when it had been daylight just a few minutes ago? Or at least he had thought that it had been daylight just a few minutes ago. Skypaw nodded, though, and began following Toadleap back towards camp. Whenever they arrived, Toadleap looked at him and said, "I think you should get some sleep, Skypaw. Apparently, you've had a long day .. " Toadleap glanced at the hawk in the fresh-kill, so Skypaw figured that Toadleap knew he had killed the creature. Of course he knew, why else would he be looking at the hawk like that?

Skypaw nodded, then walked over to the herb storage where Toadleap stored all of the herbs at. He dropped the herbs from his jaws into the storage, then walked inside of the medicine cat's den and over to the mossy nest that he slept at.

He'd almost died today. How many other apprentices have almost died in their lifetime, and been saved by their mentor that they disliked so, so very much? Skypaw started to like Toadleap a little bit more now. But, only a little bit.

Chapter Six

When Skypaw awoke, he awoke surrounded by that same, dark misty aroma that had haunted him the night before, and left him with quite the scar on his side. The wound was still there, as expected, and looked even more gruesome in The Dark Forest than it did in the wakening world. He grimaced as he forced his eyes to get used to the misty area. All he could see at the moment was the dark, blackish silhouettes of the trees, and a few bushes. Frowning, his eyes adjusted to the darkness and he could finally see. Well, better than he could see before, anyway.

There was no cat in sight - no white and black tom by the name of Swiftstar, or any other Dark Forest warrior that he could make out - however, he did hear some voices and a few painful shrieks that even hurt his ears. It, however, was not as if this was unusual. Skypaw would expect this to be happening in the Dark Forest. He sighed slightly as he followed the trace of the voices that he had heard just a few minutes ago, and when he got there, he hid in some bushes. It would be terrible to be caught eavesdropping, however, isn't everything legal whenever it comes to The Dark Forest? He grinned a bit at the thought.

Skypaw could make out a familiar, ginger-cream she-cat with green eyes that twinkled in the darkness of a place such as The Place of No Stars. He watched her, and soon enough he spotted two other shapes apparently dissolve out of nothingness, and they striked up a quick conversation with her, from as far as he could tell. The smaller of the two was a gray she-cat with white patches, while the other was a white tom with gray patches. They both had blue eyes, and both were scarred, however, the she-cat had a rather peculiar scar on her shoulder, and Skypaw had to force himself to look away from it. It wasn't as if scars would be deemed odd in such a cruel, brutal place like this. He'd be considered strange if he was caught staring, he knew.

Skypaw, however, wasted no time by paying attention to the tom

and the she-cat, who looked to both be littermates by their eyes and their fur colors. Skypaw saw the she-cat turn her head, and it looked as if her penetrating, ice cold, blue eyes were staring at him. Or straight through him, was more like it. Skypaw moved a bit in the bushes, causing them to rustle. Honeypaw took a step closer to him, and then peered through the bushes to see Skypaw. "Didn't think you'd be able to hide for long, did you, Skypaw?" she chuckled, glancing at the slight smaller apprentice.

"Uhh ... " Skypaw blinked, trying not to sound suspicious. "Why are you even here?" he asked Honeypaw, whose face, in turn, became confused and puzzled before clearing off again, back to her normal expression.

"Ask yourself the same question," she replied calmly. "We're possibly going to have close to the same response, if you think about it." Skypaw pondered this for a second. What was Honeypaw suggesting, and had she actually meant to show up here in the first place? Of course, Skypaw couldn't deny that he wanted to become a Warrior, even if that meant having to secretly train in a place as brutal as this, but Honeypaw, now ... she just sounded suspicious, if you decided to ask him. Which no one ever would, and that was quite obvious.

Finally, Skypaw responded to Honeypaw's retort. "It's because I'm wanting to become a Warrior, Honeypaw. What else do you think it would be?" The sparkle in Honeypaw's eyes came back, and it looked exactly as it did before he went to sleep that night, whenever they had been talking to eachother. Had she known that he's ben training here all along? And if she did, how could he have not happened to have realized the fact sooner?

Honeypaw chuckled. "That's close to my answer, except, I'm not wanting to become just any other, regular old Warrior ... " she paused for dramatic effect, and that made Skypaw blink. "I'm wanting to become the Leader someday. I'd be even better than Loststar, y'know," she chuckled. Now then, Skypaw hadn't exactly been the friendliest to his mother ever since he appointed him to become Toadleap's apprentice, but, his mother didn't deserve to be insulted and treated so lowly by that, even by his crush. She was like a hero amongst MapleClan, and even some of the other Clans as

well.

Skypaw growled a bit, which just made Honeypaw laugh even more. "Don't insult Loststar like that, Honeypaw," he stated, thinking that maybe Honeypaw wasn't so sweet afterall. He glared at her coldly, and she glared back in the same way. Finally, the gray-and-white she-cat interrupted them.

"Alright, alright!" she hissed. "Stop with the petty fighting. Swiftstar will be here soon, and you know he wouldn't want to see such pathetic arguing whenever he shows up!" she pointed out, and that comment simply made all of them shut up. "Anyway," she started again, this time in a much calmer tone. "My name is Ivymist, and my brother here, is Fogsecret. He can't talk, and no one knows why. Apparently it was a birth defect, or something, I don't know," she gave a shrug, and Fogsecret just nodded. Whenever they finished talking, they heard a deep gruff voice behind Ivymist and Fogsecret.

It was Swiftstar, and he had a few other Dark Forest warriors and apprentices trailing behind him. He cleared his throat and sat down, while Ivymist, Fogsecret, Honeypaw, and Skypaw all turned to look at him attentively. "I have a plan to discuss with you ... "

Chapter Seven

Skypaw was almost afraid of what Swiftstar might say. Afterall, it's obvious that whenever a Dark Forest cat has a plan, it's not going to be no good plan, and oftentimes, it's going to involve blood, death, and gore. Then again, considering the fact that he's a medicine cat, he's seen enough blood, and he's seen the death of his three littermates ... he winced a bit as he thought about them, causing Fogsecret to look at him weird and open his mouth as if he was about to make a remark, then he quickly closed it. Skypaw began to wonder if Fogsecret was really mute, or if he just didn't talk.

Skypaw turned his attention back to Swiftstar, who had clearly sensed that he had zoned out because he had paused. Even as he continued speaking, he was still glowering at Skypaw. Skypaw didn't respond in any shape, way, or form to that. "As I was saying," Swiftstar said, with an edge to his tone, however, it was barely noticeable and only those who were paying real close attention to Swiftstar's words would hear it - and Skypaw definitely wasn't doing any of the above, so he wouldn't have ever noticed it.

" ... I have a plan to discuss with the four of you," he had a twisted smile on his face, and that, in all itself, made him look ... rather distorted, in Skypaw's opinion. "Especially Skypaw," that was an insult, Skypaw could tell just by the way he enunciated and pronounced those words. Not to mention, that hateful tone he had leaking into his voice as he watched Skypaw. Then again, he looks at almost everybody with that face ... should he be offended? Honestly, that seemed like Swiftstar's neutral facial expression, if you asked him.

"Skypaw, it seems as if you are ... lacking the natural qualities that a Dark Forest Apprentice In-Training needs to obtain. For example, can you try to, perhaps ... convince that old fool - er, Toadleap! - to teach you some more battle moves instead of .. herbs," he ended the statement with venom in his tone. Obviously, he seemed rather disgusted by herbs, which was peculiar to Skypaw but he decided

not to say anything about it. "Anyway," Swiftstar continued his plan. "Each of you will have the chance to prove yourselves. Honeypaw and Ivymist have each already proved themselves by doing something that I, hmm ... set up for them, perhaps. However, Skypaw and Fogsecret still have to deem themselves worthy of mine - and these other Dark Forest warriors' - presence," he ended the sentence with a cocky smirk.

"Honeypaw and Ivymist, you two still have the chance to prove yourselves further, you know ... " he smiled slightly, though Skypaw wasn't sure if that smile was suggesting a good thing, or a bad thing. He hoped that it was not the latter, yet, of course, it was ... as it always would be, and shall remain that way for a long, long time, Skypaw knew. "You will know when to prove yourselves whenever the time becomes right, and then, you two will have to jump to grab the chance. However, you two are in different Clans, might I add ... yet, the time you two prove yourselves - if you figure out when, and how - will be at exactly the same time, and exactly the same place ... " Skypaw was weirded out by this, and wondered how Swiftstar, exactly, could make that work. Of all ways that Swiftstar could've made them prove themselves, he just had to choose the one most complicated ... for him. Skypaw almost laughed out loud, but he at least muffled it into a small, slighter snicker. It was better than plain out laughing for no good reason that the other cats knew of, Skypaw supposed, and looking like a maniac ...

Swiftstar continued once more, after he had paused a few minutes so that he could let all of those words that he had just said sink into each and every one of their brains ... and it did. Or, at least it did Skypaw's anyways. He didn't really know what it did to Honeypaw, Fogsecret, and Ivymist, but he sure knew that he had thought about what Swiftstar said. Swiftstar then started shooing the other cats that had been clumped around him away, and so they left, practically dissolving or just walking away, if they wanted to be like that ... "CloudClan and MapleClan will be the two Clans that will rule, for a time ... after they have destroyed the other two Clans, WolfClan and MeadowClan, that is. Then, they will clump together to form one Clan; SwiftClan. And they will rule the forest, and more ... " This made Skypaw blink. Swiftstar was over exaggerating, right? Skypaw secretly hoped that he wouldn't make them form one

Clan. He rather liked having multiple Clans in the forest, even though that meant more enemies and rivals ... it also meant more friends, and sometimes, the Gatherings could be fun. If there was only one Clan, then there wouldn't be any need for a Gathering ...

"We don't need a Warrior Code, either, do we, Swiftstar?" Honeypaw asked. That almost made Skypaw gasp, and he was rarely ever astonished, surprised, or even simply stunned ... but clearly, Honeypaw wasn't as sweet as the other MapleClanners thought her to be.

Swiftstar grinned at her proudly, and nodded his head. "That's right, Honeypaw. That's right. We don't need a Warrior Code ... all the Warrior Code does is make Warriors weak. Pathetic. Like petty little kittypets, that will only make the Clans crumble, if it lasts any longer ... well, before we crumble the Clans ourselves, anyway." Skypaw abruptly woke up at that. He couldn't help himself, as he couldn't control whenever he awoke and whenever he didn't want to awake.

Skypaw was still astonished about what Honeypaw had said back there in the Dark Forest. He blinked his eyes once, twice, and then looked down at his wounds to see that the cobwebs had fallen off by the time he was asleep. He sighed, walking over to the Medicine Cat's storage, padding past Toadleap on his way there. He could see that the elderly tom was still asleep, so he carefully pulled out some cobwebs and wrapped them around his wounds the best that he could, considering that he was the one doing it instead of someone else having to help him put them on. Whenever he was done, he walked outside of the Medicine Cat's den and trotted over to the fresh-kill pile, snatching up a small bird, considering that he didn't have much of an appetite at the moment, not after hearing about what Honeypaw had said in the Place Of No Stars, about her not wanting there to be a Warrior Code .. he could understand, and does understand, that some cats don't agree with certain parts of the Code, but it would just be plain stupid - he thought - for them to have to demolish the whole Warrior Code, completely and fully.

Skypaw could see that Honeypaw had awoken as well, and was currently clambering over to the fresh-kill pile, with her honey-ginger tail waving behind her. He could see her stop to speak a few

words to her father, Milkdrop, before approaching the fresh-kill pile and silently pulling out a crow before noticing Skypaw. "Oh. Hi, Skypaw." That twinkle was in her eyes again. That weird, sadistic twinkle. He wondered if anyone else has ever caught that thing gleaming twistedly in her eyes before he did yesterday, or if he was just the only one to notice it ... it was probably a Dark Forest thing, he figured. Shaking his head, he decided that he might as well not ignore her. That wouldn't exactly result in the best thing, and it was quite easy to tell that much.

Skypaw gulped down the rest of his meal before finally responding to Honeypaw. "Hey, Honeypaw," he meowed, trying to sound as casual as was possible, even though he was suspicious of her and her intentions. Actually, he didn't even have to be suspicious - he already knew that she didn't have good intentions for MapleClan, or any of the Clans at all, actually .. Honeypaw smiled brightly.

"So how are you, Skypaw?" she asked, even though she sure well knew how he was doing, considering that she had practically been speaking to him just a few minutes ago ...

"I'm doing fine, Honeypaw," he meowed, before blinking as he saw two toms come up behind Honeypaw, and another she-cat. One of the toms was Wolfpaw - one of the apprentices that used to bully him before he became a medicine cat apprentice - and the other tom was Reedpaw, a cat who had only just recently became an apprentice. Then the she-cat was Icepaw, a descendant of Froststar and one of his mate's. He could clearly see that Wolfpaw was looking at him weirdly, as if wondering why a she-cat like Honeypaw would be hanging out with a loser like him - Skypaw. Reedpaw didn't seem bothered by it, though, and Icepaw looked as if she would agree with just about anything Wolfpaw decided upon, so she was looking at Skypaw rather strangely and cruelly as well. Sighing, Skypaw lashed his tail. "I see that you have company, Honeypaw," he meowed, and Honeypaw looked behind her as if surprised to see them. Skypaw rolled his eyes. She probably knew that they were there and what they were doing. "I'll be going. I'll just go to hunt," he meowed, content with his decision.

As soon as he turned tail to leave, he could hear Wolfpaw talking about him, before finally saying in a voice so loud that it was

almost a shout, "Yeah, you better get going, runt! I don't even know why Honeypaw would be talking to you, anyhow!" Skypaw growled, sheathing and unsheathing his claws.

"Put a mouse in it, Wolfpaw!" Skypaw spat, whirling around to face the tom. Even he was surprised by his own words, considering that meant he was actually standing up for his own self, for once. Wolfpaw seemed shocked, too, obviously expecting Skypaw to be too hurt to give a response to him. And he sure was wrong about that, too. Wolfpaw fluffed up a bit so that he looked a tad bit larger, but Skypaw wasn't fazed by that at all. "I don't care about what you have to say about me, Wolfpaw!" he growled, finally sheathing his claws back in.

Wolfpaw was clearly upset by his outburst. Not in the sad way of upset, either, but the angry way. Hissing, Wolfpaw tried to pounce on Skypaw, but Skypaw, using his height to his advantage, zipped straight underneath and through his legs. Wolfpaw landed on the ground, and Skypaw took advantage of that as well by tackling the larger tom and pinning him to the ground. By now, Honeypaw and Icepaw were both looking on, stunned, while Reedpaw was growling for Wolfpaw to beat Skypaw up instead of just sitting there underneath his grip. Skypaw's ears were currently pinned back against his head, and his teeth were bared straight in Wolfpaw's face.

A large voice boomed over them. "Stop this immediately!" Loststar and Toadleap both said at once, appearing before the two fighting apprentices. "You both should know better!" Loststar scolded, and Toadleap nodded in agreement.

"Especially you, Skypaw!" he said. "You're a medicine cat, therefore, you are supposed to be the peacemaker! Who started this fight?!" he demanded, looking at all of the cats, his gaze intense. Wolfpaw gulped slightly as all three apprentices turned their heads towards him.

Toadleap managed to calm down a bit, but just barely. "Good. I just wanted to know who started this fight. Skypaw, I will be speaking with you in private," Toadleap growled.

"And I would like to join in on this conversation," Loststar meowed. "Well, right after I finish talking to Wolfpaw, anyway," she glared down at the apprentice, flexing her claws and sinking them into the ground.

Skypaw shamefully followed Toadleap into the Medicine Cat's den, as Loststar began leading Wolfpaw to her den, and the three other apprentices - Honeypaw, Reedpaw, and Icepaw - continued on as if nothing had just happened.

Chapter Eight

Half a moon later, and Skypaw was still being regularly reprimanded and scolded for "injuring" Wolfpaw, even though he hadn't hurt the apprentice at all - the only thing that he had done was pin him to the ground. Wolfpaw and most of his other littermates ignored him or tried to avoid him - well, all except Bearpaw, anyway, and Icepaw bugged him a lot as well.

Bearpaw would often tease him or threaten to hurt him if he ever laid a paw on any of his siblings again. "Don't worry, I'm not planning on hurting them again. I'm still being scolded. Have you ever been scolded?" Bearpaw was caught off-guard by this question, because it basically just popped up out of nowhere. It was like Skypaw was opening up a whole new topic in this ... er, conversation, if that's what you'd like to call it instead of an argument.

Bearpaw blinked. "Why, yes, I have been scolded, actually. I get scolded a lot, too. By Cherryflower, Loststar, Firehawk, even some of the regular Warri - hey, why are you asking me this anyway? What's it to ya?" Bearpaw questioned, unsheathing his claws and sinking them into the dirt. Skypaw shrugged his shoulders, unsheathing his claws as well. He could somehow sense an unwanted presence somewhere in MapleClan territory ... and he didn't know what it was, but, it was there, and he was sure of it.

"I'm not sure why I even bothered asking that," Skypaw responded, slightly amused. "I was just wondering, I suppose." Bearpaw blinked at him some more, and took a step back.

"You've been acting real different for awhile now, Skypaw," Bearpaw pointed out the obvious. "Why is that? Usually you're so weak and cowardly, you'd run whenever someone provokes you. Now you just stay and fight ... or you, er, annoy them until they give up." Skypaw almost laughed out loud at the last part, though he didn't want to look crazy in front of the whole Clan.

"I'm not sure what's gotten into me, to be honest, Bearpaw," he responded with as casual a tone as possible. Of course, he knew why he had been acting different lately. It was because 0f how regularly he's been visiting the Dark Forest and training. As a matter of fact, he visits the Dark Forest almost every night now, and he isn't so dumbstruck now whenever Honeypaw says something in there that has to do with going against the Warrior Code, StarClan, or MapleClan itself. As a matter of fact, now that he thought about it, he was actually used to her saying things like that, and he almost agreed with her now -*almost,* but not quite.

And now, he has actually become rather close friends with Ivymist and Fogsecret, but mostly just Ivymist, considering that Fogsecret couldn't talk. Well, either he couldn't, or he wouldn't, and Skypaw wasn't sure which one it was. Bearpaw looked at him weirdly once more, and he was about to respond, when all of a sudden a different voice rose up from the entrance of the camp. "There's a battle happening at the border! Hurry! Warriors and apprentices alike, follow me to the CloudClan border!" the voice belonged to Loststar, and as soon as Bearpaw heard those very words, he raced out of camp, the conversation he had been having with Skypaw forgotten.

Skypaw rushed to go join the fighting Warriors and Apprentices, but all of a sudden, Toadleap appeared behind him. "Oh, no you don't!" he said as he grabbed onto Skypaw's tail, putting him into a halt. For an elderly cat, Toadleap was strong. "You're staying here with me so that you can help to heal the injured cats when they get back!" he ordered. Skypaw hissed sulkily, following the older cat into the Medicine Cat's den.

"Spread out these herbs, Skypaw," Toadleap ordered, pulling a few freshly - picked herbs from the storage that they had in the back of the Medicine Cat's den. Skypaw crankily obeyed, picking up a few of those herbs and spreading them out carefully in front of him. Toadleap turned around to see Skypaw's progress, and he nodded approvingly whenever he saw that the apprentice was doing it correctly. "Good," he meowed.

'Don't listen to the old fool,' a voice whispered in Skypaw's ear. Skypaw immediately knew that it belonged to Swiftstar. *'Hurry, this is your chance to prove yourself. Once his back is turned ... run. Fight*

*like a Warrior, like you should rightfully be.'*Skypaw nodded contently, then spread out some more of the herbs, watching Toadleap through the corner of his eyes until he noticed that Toadleap's back was turned.

'Now!' the voice ordered, and Skypaw ran out of the medicine cat's den as fast as he could. "Skypaw! Wait!" Toadleap yowled, trying to chase after him but stopping whenever Skypaw made it out of camp. Skypaw, panting, was in the middle of the territory now, by himself. He could hear yowls and shrieks and battle-cries coming from the direction of the CloudClan border, and he raced towards it.

Skypaw could see Fogsecret there, fighting his heart out against the MapleClan warriors. Skypaw, still panting, quickly rushed into battle, spotting Honeypaw there as well, fighting alongside Reedpaw against a much larger CloudClan warrior. Skypaw growled, leaping towards the small fight, and bit the MeadowClanner on his leg. Hissing at the surprisingly small newcomer, the warrior turned around and raked his claws over Skypaw's right ear. Skypaw growled, ignoring the stinging of the cat's thorn-sharp claws against his flesh, and continued on fighting until the Warrior, finally beaten by the apprentices, turned and raced off towards the MeadowClan camp. Skypaw spat on the ground, and Honeypaw looked at him, her eyes gleaming. "That was good!" she meowed praisingly. Skypaw smiled in thanks, as Reedpaw nodded his head in agreement towards Honeypaw's words.

Then, Skypaw turned and raced off to find another cat to fight. He was abruptly stopped by one of CloudClan's apprentices, a silver she-cat with black stripes and blue eyes. Before Skypaw even had as much as a chance to react to this, the she-cat pinned him to the ground with her claws dangling dangerously close to Skypaw's neck. Would they really be willing to kill in order to win a battle? Were CloudClanners really that much of a savage? They were acting just as if MeadowClan would in a battle, though he doubted that even they would be willing to kill - no, murder - in order to win one of their battles.

Skypaw suddenly came up with an idea. He let out a deep, throaty

growl before bringing his hind-legs up against the CloudClan she-cat's stomach, kicking her off of him. He was still panting heavily, even now, and he didn't know how to continue on with this fight. His movements were awkward, like someone's would be if they were inexperienced with this kind of ... well, fighting. The CloudClan apprentice was panting too - no, she was gasping - and shaking, as if she was going through something extremely painful. Studying her, Skypaw noticed that she was bleeding out through her stomach and her chest. As soon as he realized this, she collapsed to the ground, and in just a few minutes, her entire body went stiff and numb ... Skypaw was shocked. He took a step back as he noticed this. Was it ... was it his fault that this innocent apprentice was dead? It wasn't her fault that this battle had started, and she was just trying to defend her Clan, Skypaw knew. All of a sudden, he heard an unfamiliar tom voice shriek, "Swanpaw! She's dead!" It obviously belonged to one of CloudClan's warriors, or else he most likely wouldn't have known her name.

Skypaw took a few more steps back until his back was practically against a tree. He shook his head, sighing softly, knowing that he had just took away someone's life, before charging back into the battle headfirst. He could see some of the CloudClanners snaking their way through the battle, quickly and gracefully, and making their way towards MapleClan camp. Skypaw, however, didn't have time to bother with that, and so he figured that one of MapleClan's other cats would take care of those CloudClan warriors. *'You have proven yourself. But keep on fighting.'* It was Swiftstar's voice. He would recognize that cold voice anywhere he went from now on. Some more CloudClan cats were starting to crowd around Swanpaw's dead body, trying to see what was wrong with her.

"CloudClan, retreat!" the CloudClan deputy, Midnightflower, yowled into the clearing. The CloudClan cats all raced back towards CloudClan camp, while a few of the warriors stayed behind to help carry Swanpaw's dead, cold, stiff and limp body back towards camp, with Ivymist and Fogsecrert included in that bunch. Whenever they all made it back towards camp, Firehawk turned to look at his warriors and apprentices of MapleClan, panting heavily.

"Is everyone alright?" Firehawk had a couple of scratches himself,

including one that was on his leg that caused him to limp a bit. Most of the Warriors nodded their heads, and very few had life-threatening injuries. Skypaw, even, only had a few scratches and bruises, perhaps even a small nick in his ear, if even that.

"I have a bruise on my tail, but that's it," Bluemask, one of MapleClan's senior warriors, stated with a shrug.

"All that I have is a bit of a scratch on my side, and that's about it," that voice belonged to Pebblefall, Loststar's best friends out of all of the fellow cats in MapleClan. They had known eachother since they were kits, or at least apprentice's - um, she-cat apprentices - or something like that, and that's about all Skypaw knew about their friendship except that they had obviously known eachother for a very, very long time.

Firehawk nodded, letting out a small sigh. "Good," he meowed, clearly glad that nobody had any life-threatening injuries that could effect the Clan. "We should head back to camp now, since we have some really good news to tell Loststar." he pointed out, and lead the big group of MapleClanner's towards the camp right in the middle of the territory. Skypaw didn't think that it was some good news, though. He had practically just murdered an innocent apprentice, one that belonged to CloudClan, causing their Clan to retreat. They were probably ashamed for being forced to retreat right in the middle and midst's of a battle, but most likely they weren't as ashamed as Skypaw was, for having killed a cat ..

Sighing, Skypaw shook his head in order to clear it from such negative thoughts. He might as well not think about Swanpaw's death, though he knew it was going to remain eating away at his brain for quite awhile ... whenever they arrived back at camp, he could only find Loststar and a couple of other Warriors, including Firehawk, hunched over the body of Toadleap, and for a second, Skypaw was puzzled. Confused. What were they doing, and why were they hunched over his body like that? What had happened to him?

Skypaw, blinking, slowly made his way over, and when he got there, he was shocked. Toadleap was motionless. He wasn't breathing, and when Skypaw pressed his ear down to the elderly

tom's chest, his heart wasn't beating, either. "Toadleap?" he murmured, looking down at his mentor. Even though Skypaw hadn't agreed with Toadleap making him stay back at camp, and had even escaped from camp due to that, he had grown quite close to Toadleap over this past moon. "Toadleap?" he repeated again, although he knew that he was dead. "Toadleap, you can't be dead," he whispered, nudging him. "I still have to train some more, remember? I don't know every name of herb, or their usages ... come back, you have to. I'm not ready to become a medicine cat yet ... Toadleap?" Skypaw frowned, his eyes watering as he pressed his nose into Toadleap's furry and gray ... but bloody ... side.

Loststar sighed, depressed for her son and depressed for Toadleap's death, and made the other Warriors, as well as her, leave Skypaw to mourn his dead mentor in peace. Skypaw could now understand why those CloudClan warriors had been snaking their way through the battle in order to make it to camp ... had they wanted to kill Toadleap? Was that what it was? But why would anyone want to murder a medicine cat, of all cats? They should know better ... Skypaw, though, he began to wonder if this had been his fault. Afterall, maybe if he hadn't left the camp in order to fight the battle, if he hadn't been so selfish, maybe he would've been able to defend Toadleap against those couple of monstrous CloudClanner's, if that's even what they had been in the first place ...

Skypaw sighed, finally lifting his nose from Toadleap's side, and noticed that there was a strange, weird-looking marking carved into his side, obviously by claws ... he blinked. *'What could this mean?'* he thought quietly to himself.

Chapter Nine

It was the Halfmoon, therefore, Skypaw would have to be returning to the Shining Stone to catch up with what's been happening with StarClan, except .. he would have to be going alone this time around, because there was no Toadleap in MapleClan anymore. Skypaw winced just thinking of his mentor, and he sighed. Skypaw looked through the herb storage in the back of the Medicine Cat's den until he found what he figured was Chamomile, the herb that you used in order to travel, considering that the Shining Stone was rather far away from the Clans' territories, and even more so for MapleClan.

Skypaw ate the herb reluctantly. It tasted terrible, but he didn't want to literally fall asleep on the way to the Shining Stone. He then padded out of the Medicine Cat's den and looked over at the fresh-kill pile longingly, but he knew that he couldn't eat before he visited StarClan. Then again, maybe one bite wouldn't hurt? He shook his head and walked over to Loststar, whom was currently sitting on the top of the Highrock, watching over her Clan. "I'm leaving to go to the Shining Stone, since it's the Halfmoon," he murmured to her from below the Highrock. Her ears perked, indicating that she could hear him even from up there. "I have to get my Medicine Cat name, afterall," he frowned. Loststar nodded and blinked, zoning off to think about Toadleap, from as far as Skypaw could tell.

Skypaw exited the camp and made his way towards the Shining Stone. First, he would be required to leave his own territory, of course, and then he would have to go past MeadowClan's territory, and they weren't exactly the nicest Clan in the forest; however, they had enough sense not to bother the Medicine Cats' when they were on their way to the Shining Stone.

Skypaw walked past the waterfall, gazing at it for a minute before ordering himself to stop sightseeing, considering that he's seen MapleClan's territory lots of times in his life, so he really shouldn't

be in such awe at it anymore. But, the waterfall was MapleClan's main attraction, and lots of times, you could spot loners, rogue's, and even kittypet's there, looking at the waterfall with amazement sparkling in their eyes. Sighing, Skypaw realized that he could barely even hear his own thoughts from the roaring of the waterfall. He turned away, heading towards the Shining Stone once again. *'At least try not to get distracted this time,'* he thought quietly to himself as he walked along the MapleClan border until he reached MeadowClan.

Once he reached MeadowClan's border he stopped, panting just a little bit. Then he continued on, and eventually he met up with MeadowClan's medicine cat, Foxflight, and his apprentice, Nightpaw. Foxflight looked at Skypaw with pity. "I heard about what happened," he murmured, resting a tail on Skypaw's shoulder comfortingly.

"I don't need your pity," Skypaw snapped, making Foxflight blink at him in surprise. Skypaw sighed again, directing his gaze on the ground, and continued walking forward, ahead of Foxflight and Nightpaw. However, Nightpaw caught up with him in just a few fast strokes of her legs.

"I know that's just your way of dealing with things," she whispered, looking at him while Skypaw tried his best to block out her voice. "It's okay, Skypaw - it's okay to show your feelings. It really is - no one will judge you. I won't judge you. The other medicine cats won't judge you. And if they do, well, they're not a very good medicine cat, if you ask me," she chuckled a bit, obviously trying to get him to speak to her.

Skypaw frowned. "I-I ... whatever." Though his voice this time, it wasn't dripping as much venom as it had whenever he had spoken to Foxflight. Though, Toadleap's death wasn't the only reason that he was feeling this way - it was also the fact that he, was a murderer, even as a medicine cat.

The CloudClan medicine cat, currently without an apprentice, jogged up to them. Her name was Roseleaf, and everyone thought that she was a very pretty she-cat. However, she, for one, stuck to the Warrior Code at all costs, and would never try to become mates

with someone, since she was a Medicine Cat and medicine cat's aren't supposed to have mates.

Roseleaf looked at Skypaw with a clear indication of pity in her eyes, however, she didn't say anything like the MeadowClanners had. Roseleaf slowed a bit so she could keep pace with the speed that Foxflight was going, and they began talking to eachother, while Skypaw and Nightpaw listened on in peace. "Did you know that a fight broke out between MapleClan and CloudClan a few days ago?" Roseleaf asked Foxflight, who blinked at her in surprise.

"Oh, really?" he asked, interested. "What happened? Do you know the reason why?" he questioned.

Roseleaf shook her head. "Duststar doesn't want me to be telling all the details, however, some of the cats who came back were rather ... injured. One was even killed," she frowned. "And I suppose that I can tell you who it was," she added, before Foxflight had even a chance to open his mouth and speak. "You would find out eventually, anyway. Swanpaw, was the one who had been killed," she sighed softly in hidden sadness, and Skypaw flinched at the name of the apprentice that he had killed - he couldn't help it. He hated what he had done to that poor, innocent apprentice.

Nightpaw had noticed that flinch, and she looked at him with mild curiosity. "What's wrong?" she asked him again. Skypaw blinked, shaking his head in order to collect his thoughts. Finally, he sighed.

"It's nothing," he meowed.

"Come on, I know something's bothering you," Nightpaw urged him on, obviously wanting him to answer her question.

Skypaw frowned. "I'll tell you later," he murmured, and, luckily enough, Nightpaw was satisfied enough with that answer that she turned around, and stopped bothering him. Skypaw, however, had other plans, and he certainly didn't plan on telling Nightpaw, of all cats, what had been bothering him later on. Soon, the WolfClan medicine cat, Gingerfur, and her apprentice, Blossompaw, arrived. Together, they all started making their way towards the Shining Stone.

Gingerfur whispered something in Blossompaw's ear, and apparently that made her look at Nightpaw in disgust. Then, Gingerfur padded over to talk to the other medicine cats, Foxflight and Roseleaf. Right now, Skypaw wasn't sure if he was a full-fledged Medicine Cat, or a Medicine Cat Apprentice, considering that, at the moment, he had no mentor, yet he still hadn't earned his full Medicine Cat name yet, but would be at the Shining Stone.

Blossompaw stuck a bit too close to Skypaw, glaring at Nightpaw everytime she tried to talk to him. Skypaw suddenly began to wonder if Blossompaw liked him or had a crush on him, or just anything like that, because it certainly seemed like it. And while Nightpaw was a pure white she-cat with hazel eyes, Blossompaw was a silver-white she-cat with a light brown, front left paw and blue eyes.

Skypaw started trudging on, a bit ahead of the other Medicine Cats. Finally, they reached the Shining Stone, and Skypaw was the first one there. "Well, this is it," Gingerfur meowed when they all arrived at the entrance. Skypaw jumped inside of the cave that held the Shining Stone. All of the other cats got to their positions beside it, and then they touched their noses to it, so Skypaw did the same. There was a rush of cold that went up his body, down to his paws, and there was a slight sting, then nothing.

Skypaw's eyes opened to an unfamiliar, starry, bright place. It was very different from the Dark Forest, where everything was cold and dark. Here in StarClan, it was sunny and warm, bright, there were stars in the sky, as he had expected, unlike how it was in the Place Of No Stars. Skypaw walked along the StarClan ground until he heard the bushes rustle, just slightly. He turned his head to find out where the noise came from, and he saw Toadleap there in front of him. "Toadleap?" he said, looking at him. Toadleap didn't look like himself at all; he looked much, much younger, like a young warrior, and, not to mention the fact that he had stars in his fur now, and he was glowing slightly.

Toadleap smiled. "Yes, it's me, and yes, I know that I look a bit different than I had before, Skypaw," he stated. "Whenever you go to StarClan, the age that you were whenever you felt the happiest down on MapleClan, is the age that you look like and feel like, up

here in StarClan. Therefore, if you were happiest when you were young, you look like you did many, many moons ago - and if you were happiest when you were old, you look like what you did at the time of your death, or at least close to it," he meowed.

Skypaw was about to open his mouth to express his words of awe, when all of a sudden, Toadleap interrupted him. "Here, Skypaw, I have to do something. Now, stay still, and don't move a muscle," he said. Toadleap then stepped a bit closer until he was close enough to press his nose against his forehead, and he did. Skypaw's eyes closed, and all of a sudden, he felt a huge rush of things enter his head. Was that ... herbs and remedies? Their usages? Battle moves? The best hunting technique's? Good ways to patrol? All of that was in his head now. (If you're wondering, he's not going to be perfect because of this. He*knows* how to do these things, however, that doesn't mean he *can,* since there is a difference between *knowing* and *doing. For example, I know how to do math. But I don't. Also, just because you know something - that doesn't necessarily mean you're going to be the best at I, or skilled at it. Another example, would be the fact that I know how to do math. But I'm terrible at it. And science, too. I just decided to clear this up before I got any hate saying that I was making Skypaw too OP as a medicine cat, because, I'm not trying to do that. :P So I just wanted to clear that up with everyone. Now I'll just end my rambling. I think that'd be good, wouldn't it? Oh my gosh more rambling ... okay I'm shutting up now, I promise! Don't hit me. D: / endramble*

Toadleap then took a step back, and Skypaw's eyes opened. "What was ... what was that?" he murmured, gazing into Toadleap's eyes.

"Knowledge," Toadleap answered solemnly. "I have just given you all that you need to know, so that you can become the best Medicine Cat that you can be," Toadleap answered, clearly determined in making Skypaw a really great Medicine Cat. "Now, there is someone here, who I would like for you to meet," he meowed. Skypaw blinked, and then flicked his tail, doing what Skypaw guessed as indicating for someone to step forward. When the cat stepped forward, Skypaw almost dropped to the ground - and not because she was pretty, either, but because that cat was Swanpaw.

The gray she-cat looked at him softly before stepping forward. "I-I'm sorry for killing you .. S-S-Swanpaw," he mewed, worried about what she might do to him, considering that she was a StarClanner and he, well, he was just a living cat at the moment.

Swanpaw sighed. "It's okay, Skypaw," she replied. "I forgive you. I shouldn't have ... my claws were dangling way too close to your neck for comfort - and I had - I had been weak anyway. I just wanted to bring pride to CloudClan and earn my Warrior name ... well, I sorta did. My name is Swansong now, here, in StarClan," she shrugged slightly, and Skypaw slowly nodded.

"You may go, now, Swansong," Toadleap meowed, and she nodded obediently, leaving the area so that they could talk. "Skypaw, I'm going to have to perform your Medicine Cat ceremony, since I am still your mentor, despite the fact that I am in StarClan." Skypaw slowly nodded in understanding.

"Skypaw, do you promise to uphold the ways of a medicine cat, to stand apart from rivalry between Clan and Clan and to protect all cats equally, even at the cost of your life?" he asked, having to skip the first part of the Ceremony.

Skypaw nodded. "I do," he whispered.

"Then, by the powers of StarClan, I give you your true name as a medicine cat. Skypaw, from this moment on you will be known as Skyhawk. We, StarClan, honor your bravery and determination, and we welcome you as a full medicine cat of StarClan." Skyhawk knew where the meaning of his name had come from. It was from how he had killed the hawk .. due to the help of Swiftstar. He wondered if any of the StarClanners here knew that he was training in the Dark Forest. Skyhawk, at the moment, was tempted to quit going and training in the Dark Forest, due to an immense amount of guilt ... however, he wasn't sure if he should really do it or not.

"You may go now," Toadleap nodded his head. Skyhawk nodded, taking a step back from his former mentor and closing his eyes until he finally awoke from his dream about StarClan. Skyhawk could see, right now, that most of the other Medicine Cats and their apprentices were rising up from their dream as well. Some of them

looked shaken, and others looked peaceful, however, Skyhawk wasn't sure what he looked like at the moment. He would probably look like a mix of both, he supposed, considering that he had saw both Toadleap and Swansong in there .. one cat that he had killed, one cat of whom he had grown quite close to over the past few moons - that is, until he had died, anyway.

"What did you see in your dream?" Blossompaw whispered to him, though, apparently she hadn't been quiet enough, because her mentor Gingerfur shot her a look since Medicine Cats weren't supposed to share their dreams to anyone, not one cat, until they could decipher the real, true meaning of the dream. And Skyhawk, for one, hadn't really received a dream, since Toadleap had given him his Warrior name and he had met Swansong, for real, now.

"Well, I earned my full medicine cat name, for one thing, and now I'm the full medicine cat of my Clan," he whispered back to her. Blossompaw's eyes stretched wide as she looked at him in shock.

"Really?" Nightpaw interrupted her, and Blossompaw shot her another vicious look, which Nightpaw either pretended not to notice, or didn't really notice it all at. Or she was just flat-out ignoring the other she-cat. "But, aren't you younger than us? You look like it. How could you have become a full Medicine Cat already? You're so young!" Nightpaw exclaimed. Roseleaf looked at them.

"Oh, you're a full medicine cat now?" she asked, looked at Skyhawk. "That's good. What's your new medicine cat name?" she asked.

"Skyhawk," he replied.

"That's an interesting name," Foxflight meowed. He had been silent the whole time, and this was his first time speaking since Skyhawk had snapped at him earlier that day, before they had arrived at the Shining Stone.

"Yes, it is," Gingerfur agreed, looking at Blossompaw once more and then ushering her over to her. "Don't be so mean to Nightpaw, Blossompaw," she scolded her. Blossompaw looked embarrassed to be reprimanded by her mentor in front of Skyhawk, of all the cats

that she could've been embarrassed in front of ... Skyhawk rolled his eyes at his own thoughts.

"Well, congratulations," Foxflight finally said, trying to ease the tension between Gingerfur, Blossompaw, and Nightpaw. "That's some good news. I thought MapleClan would be needing a new Medicine Cat, and I truly think that important position is in the right paws, don't you all agree?" the two medicine cat apprentices nodded their heads, and then looked at eachother once more.

Roseleaf nodded. "Yes, I agree - that is some good news. Clearly, anyone who's been mentored under Toadleap will make a great Medicine Cat indeed." she smiled lightly, and Gingerfur agreed with a nod of her head and a flick of her tail.

Skypaw looked up to see that the sun was almost starting to set. Wow, had he really been in StarClan and the Shining Stone for that long? Apparently, the time had breezed by fast. Eventually, they reached MeadowClan territory, and Foxflight and Nightpaw bid farewell to the rest of the group of medicine cats. "Bye, Skyhawk," Nightpaw mewed as she left towards her camp.

"Bye, Nightpaw," Skyhawk replied with a sigh. Soon enough, Skyhawk arrived at MapleClan territory, and gently shoved Blossompaw off of his side.

"Oh! Bye, Skyhawk. I can't wait to see you again at the Gathering in a couple of sunfalls and nightfalls!" she meowed. Skyhawk rolled his eyes, though made it impossible for Blossompaw to notice it.

"Bye, Blossompaw," he said in a bit of a monotone voice, though Blossompaw didn't seem to care, she just seemed happy that Skyhawk had said "bye" back. Sighing, Skyhawk made his way past the waterfall without even bothering to stop and look at it this time. Whenever he arrived at camp, the first thing that he did was grab a mouse and a thresh from the fresh-kill pile. He gulped both of them down quickly, and then went into the Medicine Cat's den to try to get some rest ... he hoped that the Place Of No Stars wouldn't bother him this time around.

And luckily, they didn't.

*Chapter Ten

Ivymist's P.O.V.

"Wonder why Skypaw didn't come here," Ivymist thought warily as she glanced at Honeypaw, Fogsecret, and then Swiftstar. Honeypaw eyed her curiously, but whenever Ivymist glared at her she looked away.

"I'm pretty sure Skypaw went to go get his medicine cat's name today, or whatever," Honeypaw shrugged, and the very topic seemed to capture both Swiftstar's and Ivymist's interests. "I believe his name is Skybird or Skyhawk or something now." Honeypaw pointed out, and Ivymist shared a look with Swiftstar, which made Honeypaw look at them weirdly.

"That's probably it, then," Swiftstar said, and Honeypaw blinked, looking over at him from her spot in front of a bunch of darkly tinted bushels and trees. "I do think that Sky ... hawk did not want to be coming here at this moment, and if he doesn't want to come, then we can't make him. It's practically impossible." Swiftstar narrowed his eyes in annoyance, and then swiped out at the cat nearest to him with his claws, which ended with him hitting a fellow Dark Forest warrior - a golden-colored tom with hazel eyes - and knocking her down. The cat got up, spat at Swiftstar, and then left. Ivymist blinked. "And either that, or, StarClan set up some sort of protection spell against Dark Forester's like me. They will usually do that with their Medicine Cat's." Swiftstar's left eye twitched.

"Well, that's bad," Ivymist said flatly, then turned her attention back to Swiftstar's twitching amber eye. Swiftstar must've noticed, because he finally snapped and told her to stop staring at his eye. Well, he told her that whenever his eye had finally stopped twitching, that is. Ivymist stopped staring, and turned to look at Fogsecret to see how he was doing, and he seemed to be just idly glancing around the Dark Forest.

Suddenly a shriek rang out above the chatter of Dark Forester's and their trainee's. Swiftstar smirked. "Looks like that's my call," he stated, seeming mildly amused. 'Well,' Ivymist thought. 'Swiftstar's feeling amused - this is new.' she grinned. "Icestorm!" Swiftstar called out to

someone, and all of a sudden a misty white she-cat with almost invisible specks of silver splattered on her legs and back came rushing towards them. She looked as if she had been in the Dark Forest awhile, because she certainly seemed as if she was fading fast. She would disappear completely soon. "I need you to take care of these apprentice's for me while I go attend to some of my ... " he glanced towards the area where the shriek had come from. " ... business." he finished, and then made his way towards the place with the weird shrieking cats.

"Hmmm," Icestorm murmured "I see. So you all must be Fogsecret, Ivymist, and Honeypaw. Am I correct in assuming that?" she asked. All of them nodded in response.

"Yeah," Honeypaw said.

"Apparently you assumed right," Ivymist said, and Fogsecret said nothing because, well, he's Fogsecret ... and Fogsecret can't talk. Unfortunately. This made Icestorm look at Fogsecret weirdly, but she said nothing about his lack of an answer.

"What about the runt that Swiftstar always talk about? Skypaw or whatever?" Icestorm asked, rather annoyingly. Honeypaw seemed to be practically seething due to the fact that Icestom had insulted Skyhawk.

"He's not a runt, he's just the smallest out of the litter!" Honeypaw spat angrily, unsheathing her claws. Icestorm didn't even flinch because of Honeypaw's very, very visible threat.

"That's exactly what a runt is, Honeypaw," Icestorm rolled her eyes. "So, thank you for further proving my point." Honeypaw was still seething, but managed to calm herself down some.

"Whatever," Honeypaw growled. "And his name is Skyhawk now, just so that you can call him something other than 'runt.' It doesn't seem like it would be a very good nickname for someone." Honeypaw snorted.

"I really don't care, Honeypaw," Icestorm said, making sure to put extra emphasis on 'paw.' "I don't have to listen to you. Look, if Swiftstar tells me to teach you some stuff then I'm going to teach it to you all, alright? Alright. Good to see we're on the same page here." Icestorm shrugged. "Anyway, I guess I'll be teaching you all some battle moves. The one that

I will be teaching you today is called the Hold And Enemy Collapse." Then she smirked. "Earlier today, Swiftstar made me promise to make this training session extra special. You will see what I mean later," she grinned softly.

"Fogsecret and Ivymist are up first. Ivymist, you will be the one performing the move, and Fogsecret will be on the receiving end of it. Got it?" Icestorm said. Ivymist narrowed her blue eyes.

"No! I refuse to hurt my brother, you sadistic fool!" Ivymist growled.

Icestorm looked shocked, but then she growled. "You can and you will! Or I will make you!" Fogsecret snorted, doubting what Icestorm clearly thought what she could do to Ivymist.

"I won't." Ivymist stood her ground.

"Do it, or else you won't ever see your brother again. And I'll make sure of that," Icestorm snarled. Now, this was a threat. A real threat. Ivymist narrowed her eyes and a growl rumbled low in her belly, but she decided to obey for the sake of her brother's life, but apparently not his health, from as far as she could tell.

"Good," Icestorm said, sadistically but cheerily at the same time - two traits that really did not go together very well at all. Ivymist growled at her once more, and then stood behind Fogsecret. "Now then. What I want you to do is leap onto his back," and that was what Ivymist did. Fogsecret stumbled a little under her weight, but still remained grounded. Luckily. "Hold his head with your forepaws, and then use your hindpaws to knock his legs out from under him." Ivymist did as she was told, but, of course, she did so unwillingly. Fogsecret collapsed to the ground, unable to resist Ivymist's - reluctant - brute force.

"Good," Icestorm repeated. "You have officially did the Hold And Enemy Collapse. Now finish Fogsecret off." Ivymist was alarmed. Her ears perked and she glanced at Icestorm curiously.

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded.

Icestorm rolled her eyes. "You heard me - finish him off. Kill him. We need him here in the Dark Forest." Ivymist shook her head.

"No! I refuse!" she spat, standing in front of her brother protectively. "I won't kill him. You'll have to get through me if you want that to happen!" Honeypaw looked as if she wanted to intervene, but as soon as Ivymist shot a look at her, it seemed as if the thought was erased entirely from Honeypaw's mind.

Icestorm sighed and rolled her eyes, clearly irked off by Ivymist's behavior. "Fine then. I will get through you, Ivymist. Easily," and with that, she pushed past Ivymist as if she weighed nothing. "This can be our secret, Ivymist. We can just say that you killed him. It won't matter." And with that, Icestorm leaned down with her incisors sinking into Fogsecret's sensitive flesh on his throat.

Ivymist woke up to Fogsecret's dead body beside her.

And that was when her entire world collapsed.

Fogsecret woke up in a misty place. It was dark, of course, but not ... not Dark Forest dark. And he could see the stars, he knew he was dead now ... but if he could see the stars, did he ... really not end up in the Dark Forest? It seemed a bit too good to be true, if you asked him. A cat came forward. It was Sleetstar, the CloudClan leader before Duststar. Fogsecret knew little of him, considering that he had died whenever Fogsecret was just a little kit, so he was confused as to why he, of all cats, would be visiting him ...

"Fogsecret," Sleetstar clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth. "Oh, Fogsecret. What had you been thinking about whenever you started visiting the Dark Forest?" he questioned, and Fogsecret simply blinked. Sleetstar waited patiently for him to talk, and Fogsecret was confused. Sleetstar was a StaClanner, and has been for a while; shouldn't he, at LEAST, be capable of knowing that Fogsecret can't speak?

Eventually, Sleetstar realized why Fogsecret wasn't responding. "Oh, that," he murmured. "You're in StarClan now, Fogsecret. Whatever physical limitations you had down there doesn't affect you up here. You can speak," he meowed.

Fogsecret's eyes widened. "Right," he said ... and couldn't help but to feel

amazed by the fact that he could talk. For once in his life, he could talk! Except he wasn't sure if you could consider being a StarClanner making you one of the living. "I don't know what I had been thinking, Sleetstar. It's just that Ivymist said that she wanted to start training in the Dark Forest, since she's always been underestimated, and I guess ... I guess I just went along with it." he shrugged.

Sleetstar nodded. "And that was your problem. If Ivymist decided to eat a bunch of deathberries, would you?"

"If she did then I would. Because I don't know about you, but she had been the only kin I had left and I wouldn't've been able to stand living without her, you know ... " he pointed out, making Sleetstar blink.

"Well, that's besides the point! Anyway, Ivymist is starting to rethink her decision now, don't you think?" Sleetstar said. Fogsecret blinked and looked down as the ground dissolved underneath his paws, though it was as if the ground was still there because he was being held up. And right where the ground should be, was Ivymist. Alone, with silent tears streaming down her face.

Fogsecret was pretty sure that he heard Ivymist whispering, 'I'm never going to visit the Dark Forest again.' And that was that. If she decided she didn't want to visit the Dark Forest anymore, she couldn't until she changed her mind, which Fogsecret doubted that she ever would considering the whole ordeal that made her decide to make the decision ... Fogsecret was surprised as he noticed his dead body lying in the center of CloudClan camp with cats mourning him, and Duststar standing on the Highrock calling out for a meeting. "Well, this is depressing." Fogsecret sighed.

"Indeed it is." Sleetstar agreed.

Chapter Eleven

Skyhawk awoke just as a cool breeze flipped it's way through the den. He blinked, lifting his head with a frown. He looked over towards the place in the medicine cat's den where Toadleap would normally sleep. "Hey, Toadleap?" he called as he pulled himself to his paws, then it hit him like a stone. Toadleap had died multiple dawns ago. While Skyhawk had been out fighting CloudClan, Toadleap had been in here fighting for his life. Skyhawk swallowed as he remembered finding Toadleap in his den, dead. He hadn't even been able to say good-bye ... and Toadleap's last thought of Skyhawk would have been of him betraying him.

Skyhawk sighed, and then shook his head to clear his mind of such oppressing thoughts. The past was the past, and if StarClan had decided that they wanted Toadleap to join their ranks, then so be it. Skyhawk, nor anyone else in the forest, could deny what StarClan wanted. Skyhawk padded over towards the entrance of the den, and while he was there, he couldn't help but to notice bloodstains on the ground just a few feet in front of his paws. The bloodstains belonged to*Toadleap,* and he didn't want a constant reminder of his death every time he left or entered the den; he decided that he would ask a Warrior to clean it up later. He would originally ask an apprentice to do it, but he knew that it would probably disturb them more than it would a warrior, since they were so young. Though he did feel weird calling them *young,* since he was around the same age as some of the older apprentice's in the Clan.

Skyhawk padded out of the den, and a snowflake fell onto his nose. He sneezed and the snowflake dribbled off just as easily as it had fallen onto him. Then he looked down to see snow. It was the first snowfall of the season! And it was his first leafbare, too, since he had been born in late newleaf this year. He flicked his ears as he looked around camp. He saw Minnowcreek's fresh litter of kits - and most likely her last, since she was planning on retiring to the Elder's den, soon, something that she wouldn't have been able to do before. If Skyhawk could recall correctly, she had two toms and a she-kit.

The toms were both a mousy brown with white speckles on their legs. Theo only thing different about them was the fact that the bigger one had amber eyes and the smaller one had green. The amber-eyed kit was Amberkit - *how original,* Skyhawk had thought dryly, at first - and the green-eyed tom was Grasskit. And the she-kit was just a pure black, and her name was Crowkit. She also had amber eyes, like her brother. Crowkit was the largest out of the litter, too. They were all playing around in the snow while Minnowcreek watched them, amused and smiling. Something that was rare to see planted on a she-cat's face before Loststar.

Skyhawk took a deep breath, then walked over to the fresh-kill pile so that he could get a quick bite to eat. Upon approaching the fresh-kill, he noticed that there was nary anything in there except measly scraps. With a frown, he looked around and saw that hardly anyone else had eaten yet, except for a couple of queens and their kits. Upon noticing this, he grabbed one of the plumpest pieces of fresh-kill he could find - a rather big shrew with one of it's feet sliced clean off. Skyhawk snorted upon seeing that, then grabbed the creature and pelted towards the elder's den. Then he swiftly walked into the den, and was greeted by a sleeping Thornscratch in his face. Foxheart, the only other elder who had been apart of the Clan, had died in his sleep a few moons ago, probably from old age. The whole Clan had grieved, thought they had been grateful that he had died painlessly. Skyhawk silently dropped the shrew in front of the sleeping elder, and as he was about to turn to exit the den, Thornscratch startled awake. "Skyhawk?" he mumbled. "Is that you?"

Skyhawk blinked, turning around. "Yeah, it's me," he meowed, looking down at the elder as Thornscratch tried pulling himself up from the ground. Thornscratch finally heaved a great sigh and gave up, flopping back down onto the moss with a flick of his tail.

"These joints are aching. I'm glad you're a medicine cat now, Skyhawk, even if you are the youngest medicine cat I've ever seen in my life ... and yes, that is saying something. Anywho, do you believe that you could get something for me?" Thornscratch asked, then leaned down towards the shrew and started nibbling at it's side hungrily. Skyhawk dipped his head with a sigh.

"Of course, Thornscratch," Skyhawk mewed, then left the elder's den and made his way towards the herb storage, which was just near the far left corner of the medicine cat's den. He sorted through all of the herbs in the stack and eventually pulled out some daisy leaves that he found. Then he chewed them into a paste and walked back over to the elderly tom. Quietly, he spit out the paste and rubbed it along the area where Thornscratch's joints usually ached. Thornscratch blinked at him gratefully whenever he was done, and then Skyhawk left.

Skyhawk sighed as he picked around the fresh-kill pile. He picked up a measly little crow. It was skinny as a stick, but it would have to do. It was better than nothing, after all. He didn't seem to have much of an appetite this morning, anyway, which meant that the kits and queens could easily get more prey if they needed it. Seeing as no other cat seemed to be eating right now other than Thornscratch, Foxpaw, and some of the queens and their kits, he figured that everyone else was trying to stock up on prey as well without wasting it. It was the beginning of leaf-bare, and MapleClan literally had hardly any food left in the fresh-kill pile. And even then, the prey that they did have was skinny, which meant that the warriors would probably be starving this season.

Skyhawk looked over towards where Loststar, Pebblestream, and Pinefall seemed to be having a conversation about the weather. He could only pick out snippets of the conversation, however, he was positive that they were talking about how harsh leaf-bare would be this year. Loststar was giving Skyhawk the side-eye, and then finally she called him over. Reluctantly, and worried that he might be in trouble, Skyhawk walked over to where Loststar was at. "What is it, Loststar?" he asked, blinking at his mother, puzzled.

Loststar glanced at the other warriors beside her, and ushered them away, telling them to go on a border or a hunting patrol. Finally, Loststar let out a deep sigh and trotted back into the leader's den, flicking her tail and motioning for Skyhawk to come inside. He obeyed, and Loststar sat down in front of him. "So, I'm guessing that StarClan told you about how MapleClan was before, correct?" she asked, her eyes narrowing curiously.

"No, actually," Skyhawk answered her, and Loststar raised an

[imaginary] eyebrow.

"Really? Well, that's pretty strange." Loststar shook her head quietly, and then said, "Well, I'm guessing that I should tell you about it, then ... I already know that you know how they had treated their she-cat's, but, of course, there was a backstory behind it all ... " her green eyes flashed angrily, and then the maddening blaze vanished from her eyes, and Skyhawk began watching her warily as he waited for her to begin speaking again. "Of course, you are very aware of the fact that I had been the first she-cat leader of MapleClan ever, right?"

Skyhawk nodded to that. "Of course I do. You t0ld me that whenever I was just a kit." he pointed out, rolling his eyes slightly, then got serious again whenever Loststar shot him a sharp, fierce look that would only ever be capable of accompanying her face ...

"Correct," Loststar replied, smiling, and then her smile dropped immediately, and she then a more serious mask covered her face. "Well, I suppose it is time that I tell you what had actually happened ... what with you being a warrior - er, medicine cat - now and all," she lashed her tail. Skyhawk blinked, but said nothing, and so Loststar took that as a sign to continue. "It's a rather dark story.

"When I was born, I had two siblings. One of them was Pinefall, which you know about. He's that brown tom that had been with me just a few minutes ago. And then there, the youngest and littlest sibling of our litter was Sunkit. She died young. For what reason we do not know, all we know is that one day Pinefall and I woke up, and we had tried getting Sunkit to wake up, too, so that she could play with us. Our mother, Cherryflower - that ginger queen in the nursery - woke up soon after and told us that she was dead - told us that she belonged to StarClan now. And we were so confused, because we didn't think that she *could* be dead. And Cherryflower had said that it was for the best that Sunkit was dead. But I couldn't help but to wish that she was still alive, and I especially do now ... because if she had still lived, she wouldn't have gone through all that suffering of being a she-cat for nothing.

"As I was saying, yes, she had died. She had received no burial, because she had just been a she-kit. It had been ordered by our

current leader, Froststar, that she get no burial because she had just been a kit at the time, and done nothing honorable. We couldn't even sit vigil for her, or anything, which had been cruel a the time. Eventually, we got over her death - Pinefall and I - and so we moved onto our next stage in life. We became apprentices. Well, he became an apprentice, but I became a she-cat apprentice. This was one of the most important stages of my life, now, Skyhawk ... and you should be proud of your mentor. Without the help and positive encouragement from Toadleap, amongst countless others I this Clan, I would have accomplished ... I would have achieved ... nothing." she was stuttering now, and Skyhawk figured that it was because she missed Toadleap - he did, too, so he could understand.

"Anyway ... yes, I was a she-cat apprentice. And there were these bullies in the Clan. They were called Rockpaw, Fernpaw, and Milkpaw. Except now, they are called Rockfall, Fernshade, and Milkdrop." she said. Skyhawk blinked.

"So, you ... you mated with a bully? That explains a lot," he remarked wryly. Loststar rolled her eyes, however glad that Skyhawk had some of his old, dry humor back into him now.

Then, Loststar sighed quietly. "I didn't have much choice. If a tom wanted to mate with a she-cat or a she-cat apprentice, then so be it. That was his choice. Back then, you could have more than one mate. If you were a tom, of course. Oftentimes the leader, deputy, and medicine cat had more than one mate. You could have as much as three mates if you were a high-ranked tom, like a leader, deputy, and even a medicine cat, since it was a sign of power then," she frowned. "Toadleap had only ever took on one mate, though, I think. I don't know what her name was, though. All I know is that it was from whenever Toadleap was way younger. And that when she died, it had become one of the most depressing stages of his entire life, or so he told me.

"But that's not the point. The ragtag group of bullies had tried hurting us when we were kits, too, though an older apprentice, Pebblepaw - now Pebblefall, my best friend - had stood up for Pinepaw and I, and then we became good friends. Best friends, now. But the bullying continued whenever we became apprentices. Um, she-cat apprentices and apprentice's, but, you know what I mean,

Skyhawk. Anyway, the bullying became physical now. Of course, it had always been physical, but now that we were apprentice's ... there really was nothing in the Warrior Code at the time that stated you couldn't hurt an apprentice as long as you didn't kill them ... obviously. And so, whenever we were bullied ... the other Warriors did nothing about it. Nor any of the other apprentice's. Not even Froststar tried to help. Eventually, though ... we made a deal. Rockfall and I. He said that as long as I became mates with him whenever he became a Warrior, he would never harm me, Pebblepaw, or my brother again. He stuck to the promise, too.

"And multiple times after that, I stood up for the Warrior Code against many warriors. Take Ravenclaw, for example, or Whiteclaw, I think. They hadn't ever been the ... well, most noble warriors." she shrugged. "But, at the time, most toms weren't. And then some more things went down. At one point, Pebblepaw and I snuck out of camp. We saw the waterfall on MapleClan territory for the first time and everything, and it really is beautiful, especially whenever you see it the first time. We got bored, soon, though - just looking around the territory wasn't all that great, and we didn't know how to hunt or patrol, so that was basically the only thing that we could do out there - so we decided to go back. But I had been lagging a little bit behind, and while Pebblepaw made her way towards camp, I heard the mewings of a kit. An injured kit. And that kit turned out to be Seedkit, one of Sunflare's kits in one of her older litters." she frowned.

"I made my way back towards camp and dropped Seedkit off at Toadleap's den. A little while after that, Woodlash came back to camp from a small skirmish with MeadowClan, wounded ... with the same mysterious mark on his side that had also been on Seedkit's side." And then Skyhawk cut her off.

"Wait a minute, marking? Like the one on Toadleap's side?" he asked.

"Like that one, yes, now please let me continue," Loststar demanded. Skyhawk nodded and sat down so that Loststar could continue. He couldn't help but to have to shuffle his paws nervously as he waited for what she had to say next. "Woodlash was attacked by the same group next, though he survived, just like Seedkit did. And he had

received that same strange marking that so many other cats had on their sides before they were murdered or hurt." Loststar shook her head sadly.

"Not to mention that, sometime between where Seedkit had been hurt and Woodlash had been hurt, I, for one, had finally mated with Rockfall," she shivered quietly. "And a few moons, maybe one or two, after the Woodlash incident, I gave birth. But after that ... a few days after that, I had been out of the nursery talking to Pebblestream. And when I came into the nursery again, my kits were gone. Including you, Skyhawk." Skyhawk's eyes narrowed as he listened to this. He didn't get it. He thought that he had been the only one out of his litter, even if it was rare for a Queen to give birth to only one kit. "So I looked for you all. I looked, and I looked, and I looked. And your siblings - Lifekit, Clawkit, and Sunkit were your other siblings. And they had all died that day, with those mysterious markings carved into their sides with tooth and claw ... you were the only one of my entire litter that survived, Skyhawk." Loststar's eyes were moistening now, though Skyhawk could tell that she was - stubbornly - refusing to let the tears fall from her eyes.

"And when I brought you back to camp ...shortly after that, I was made the deputy of MapleClan. And three or four moons after that, Frostar lost his final life by a hoard of badgers ... " she shook her head sadly. "And then I was renamed Loststar, and made the leader of the Clan, which you know ... and well, that was that." she heaved out a sigh, and finally she dipped her head. "Skyhawk, you can go if you want to." Skyhawk could see that Loststar wanted to be alone for now, so he saved all of his questions for her, for later, and left the leader's den. He shook his head, and once he left the den, he was immediately greeted by Honeypaw.

"Hey," she meowed. "How come you weren't, well ... *there* ... last night?" she asked him curiously, her green eyes gleaming with what looked to be curiosity, but, who knows? It could be something more, knowing Honeypaw. She was a Dark Forester, and was probably still visiting the Dark Forest as well, unlike Skyhawk ... seeing as h didn't want anything to do with that cruel, wretched and dark place after Toadleap had been killed. He had soon learned

to accept that StarClan meant for him to become a medicine cat, and that he would be required to become one - a good one - whether he ended up liking it or not. It wasn't his choice, so it didn't matter what he thought about the entire situation, and he had long since Toadleap's death, realized that much. It would've been hard not to, after all. Though as Skyhawk searched the slightly younger apprentice's face, he could tell that she was wanting him to reply for more reasons than just plain curiosity ... she was probably planning on using him, or something else. Just like something that a Dark Forester would try.

"None of your business," Skyhawk eventually spat out, and then marched back into the medicine cat's den, leaving a rather dumbstruck Honeypaw behind him. He didn't want to speak to her at the moment. Actually, he didn't want to speak to anyone at the moment. Apparently he had just connected the dots of what Loststar had told him earlier, and, the cats that had hurt both Seedkit and Woodlash before, might've been just the cats that had managed to hurt - no, not hurt, but kill, which was even worse - Toadleap as well.

Chapter Twelve

Skyhawk sighed. 'Don't get angry, don't get angry ... Honeypaw was just being genuinely curious ... I hope.' he thought, before shaking some snow and ice off of his whiskers. He sunk the claws of his front paws into the ground, and then approached the herb storage, looking through it and wondering if there was any herbs that he may as well need to stock up on. It was barely noon yet, so he'd have plenty of time to gather up some herbs for the Clan ... as he looked through it, he noticed that he was about out of cobwebs, which was strange considering that MapleClan almost always had cobwebs in stock.

He also noticed that he was almost out of burdock root as well as daisy leaves, and the juniper berries - almost all of them were missing from the herb storage. Strange. And most of those herbs would be hard to find in the leafbare, which was bad. Skyhawk walked back outside of the den with those herbs memorized into his brain. He'd have to look extra hard for those herbs today, considering that it was leafbare, and leafbare usually didn't welcome any herbs. So he'd have to stock up quickly before they all died or rotted.

Skyhawk was extra careful not to step on Toadleap's bloodstain at the entrance of the den. Instead he quietly walked around it, really wanting to avoid that terrible thing for now. He'd have to keep reminding himself to get a warrior later and tell them to clean it up, because he really didn't want to have to do it himself ... too much memories. And he knew for a fact that Loststar wouldn't be wanting to do it, either. If it wasn't for Toadleap being so kind to Loststar, MapleClan probably wouldn't be the way it is now, and the toms would still be disrespectful and cruel to their she-cats. Which, if you asked Skyhawk, would be quite a terrible way to live, really.

Skyhawk walked out of camp, brushing past Cherrypaw's shoulder on the way out. She had whirled around on her front paws and glared at him a bit, then slinked away into the apprentice's den.

Skyhawk could tell this much just by watching her with his peripheral vision. He continued walking outside of the camp until he reached the forest that was surrounding it. He was on the far south side of the territory now, so the waterfall wasn't near. He was looking for burdock root at the moment, so he needed to be in a dry area. He pawed up some snow from the very bottom of a tree trunk. Then he started digging into the ground with his claws until he reached the roots, and then he sunk his claws under those and dug them up as well. While he was there, he also picked a few cobwebs off of some neighboring trees. The cobwebs looked quite beautiful, with snow and ice hanging onto them. Though he gently, gently nudged the frost off of the cobwebs.

There were very few cobwebs at this time, so Skyhawk continued looking for them. After awhile, he decided that he had found all that he would need, everything that he had gone out to search for, so he decided that he should return to camp already, before they became worried about him. After all, a lot of weird occurrence's have been happening lately. And not just in MapleClan, either. For if Skyhawk could recall correctly, all of the Clans have been dealing to something similar to their situation. All except MeadowClan, that is.

And that lead Skyhawk to wondering if all of this just so happened to be MeadowClan's fault ... if Toadleap's death was their fault. Then again, Toadleap had died on the day of the battle between MapleClan and CloudClan, so it must be a CloudClanner that had killed him to begin with ... right? You could never be too sure.

The next few days breezed by. Skyhawk had to deal with a few sickness', but it was mostly just a few colds that were very easy to take care of. Then, a few of the kits began developing coughs. Skyhawk had tended to them just a little bit, since they only had kitcough at the time, and it was easy to treat. But soon enough, the kits' coughs grew into whitecough, and it spread onto the other kits ... so five or six kits had whitecough, and a few even had greencough, which he usually treated those kits first. The Queens had to practically evacuate the nursery unless their kits hadn't been weaned yet, and still had to suckle. The Queens, of course, were

willing to make a sacrifice of gaining greencough - a very deadly, dangerous disease - by feeding their younger kits the milk that they need to suckle if they are to make it through the day ...

Skyhawk shook his head just thinking about it. This was one of the most oppressing times in MapleClan history. Never had they had so many cats gain greencough at the same time, or have one of their best medicine cat's - Toadleap - die of such a cruel and terrible death. Most cats - especially Clanners - knew not to hurt the medicine cats. That would get you severely punished and even exiled from your own Clan unless it was in self-defense that you had killed the medicine cat in the first place ... which, of course, it was generally very rare that a medicine cat would attack, or try to kill, another cat anyway, since they were medicine cat's, and were expected only to participate in battles, or fights, whenever necessary. That had been a rule that Skyhawk himself had broken whenever he abandoned Toadleap back at camp in order to fight in the skirmish against CloudClan the exact day that Toadleap had died.

Skyhawk pulled out the herbs that were needed in order to tend to greencough, and gently applied them to Lightningkit, a sleek black tom with a white blaze on his chest, and green eyes. Lightningkit let out a tiny mewl, like a younger kit that was a newborn rather than his 4 moons of age. "Calm down, Lightningkit," Skyhawk murmured to him. "The herbs won't hurt you. They're meant to make you feel better, and to take away the pain. Then you won't have to deal with your whitecough anymore," he meowed, and Lightningkit nodded, flicking his ears a bit before calming down.

"Why is there blood over there, near the front of the den?" Lightningkit inquired, before going into a small coughing fit, and Skyhawk was surprised that he didn't visibly flinch. On the inside, he wanted to yell at the kit, but told himself to stay calm and not to get angry in front of him. That wouldn't be any good, seeing a medicine cat - even an unwilling medicine cat - get angered and yell at a kit.

"That blood belonged to the old medicine cat, Toadleap," Skyhawk answered icily. "That blood was the same blood that dripped out of his body whenever he was brutally killed by someone ... or

something." Skyhawk wasn't going to sugarcoat it like some cats did whenever a kit asked them about something that was, well, rather disturbing. But hey, the kit had asked a question, and he was going to get a proper answer whether his mother liked it or not. Skyhawk would tell the kit the absolute truth, because the kit himself had - pretty much - asked for it.

The next cat to come up was Mintkit, a pure black she-cat with green eyes. She was from the same litter as Lightningkit, and she had a more severe form of cough than anyone else in the entire Clan - blackcough. There was almost a guaranteed death rate for anyone with blackcough, especially whenever they were kits or elders, which were often the only cats who caught any form of cough to begin with, although, sometimes the cough would spread - and could spread, at any minute now - throughout the entire Clan. Skyhawk treated Mintkit up nicely, but took more precautions whenever it came to helping her. Lightningkit's and Mintkit's mother, Berryfrost, came rushing into the medicine cat's den, suddenly. "They can't sleep, either. And they always feel jumpy." That was a nice greeting. "Do you think that you could give them something that will help them with that? To help them sleep, maybe?" she asked.

Skyhawk nodded, and then trotted over to the herb storage that was in the corner of his den. He took out some of the purple berries, juniper berries, that would help let Mintkit and Lighningkit to sleep and relax. It would also help to ease their coughing, and make it so that they wouldn't cough nearly as much as before, which was good. However, juniper berries never made the disease go fully away, so it didn't really matter. So as long as the virus was still in the kits' system, they could die from it. Or it could spread, and Skyhawk didn't know which one was the worse thing to go through. And he really wasn't even sure if he actually wanted to know, either.

Skyhawk noticed that the juniper berries felt weird. Slimy, even as thought they have juice on them. He decided to pay no mind to the way that the little purple berries felt, and instead he padded back over to Berryfrost and her two kits. He fed them each two, individual berries, and smiled at them.

Lightningkit blinked. "My tummy feels funny now .. " he meowed a few seconds after he ate the berries, and Mintkit quietly agreed. Skyhawk blinked, confused, then figured that it must probably just be the berries starting to take affect on their digestive systems. Sometimes kits would feel weird after he fed them juniper berries, and so, once again, he shrugged the problem off as nothing.

"That's just the juniper berries taking affect," Skyhawk grinned at the three cats in front of him. "It's really nothing to worry about," he added. "So, just go along and get some rest, Lightningkit and Mintkit." They both nodded, and Berryfrost started leading the two kits back to the nursery. Skyhawk returned to sorting out the herb storage, waiting for the next patient to come by, which, most likely, they soon would.

Skyhawk frowned, his thoughts soon wondering back over to Toadleap, as they had been these past few weeks since he died. It had been hard to imagine a world without Toadleap whenever the much older tom had died, but now it seemed very possible. Except Toadleap pretty much haunted his dreams now, which was not a good thing, really. He haunted his daydreams as well, which was not really hard to tell due to how he zoned off every once and awhile, forgetting about what he was doing at the moment he did that, and then rezoning back into focus a few seconds ... or minutes ... and even an hour - or hours - later.

Skyhawk was alert whenever a tortured wail rung around the clearing, and then small cries of despair. He rushed out of the den, over to where Berryfrost was. She sat there, in front of her two motionless kits. "You!" she spat as soon as she saw Skyhawk, standing up and stretching to her full height, which was just slightly taller than Skyhawk himself. "You traitor! You killed my kits! Those so-called juniper berries weren't juniper berries ... they were deathberries!" she unsheathed her claws, about to lunge, but was soon stopped by a warrior by the name of Ravencall.

Skyhawk himself was dumbstruck, staring at the kits in a mix of genuine horror and genuine curiosity. He really, truly, had no idea what happened. "I ... beg your pardon?" he blinked several times as he studied Berryfrost, who just seemed to get even angrier at, simply, his voice and his words.

"You killed my kits! Kit-killer! Warror Code breaker!" Berryfrost unsheathed her claws again. "You're a sorry excuse for a medicine cat! No, not even that ... you're a sorry excuse for a cat itself, you hear me?! You should be ashamed!" Berryfrost snarled, and was about to speak again, but was soon interrupted by Loststar as she marched over to them.

"What is going on here?!" Loststar yowled, so loud that everyone in the entire clearing hushed. "Stop harassing my son, your medicine cat!"

"Well, your son, Loststar, is a kit killer!" Berryfrost growled, then motioned to her two dead kits right in front of her. "Skyhawk fed them deathberries!"

Loststar narrowed her eyes, before gazing at Skyhawk. "Is she correct in assuming this, Skyhawk?" she questioned, and all that Skyhawk could do in response to his mother was to faintly shake his head.

"Minnowcreek, what do you think?"

"Deathberries ... they couldn't have been killed by the cough so quickly ... "

"Cherryflower?" Loststar confided in her mother.

"Deathberries ... " was all that Cherryflower responded to her with, and Skyhawk could spot the faintest of faint tears in Loststar's eyes.

"Skyhawk, go." she ordered.

"But I didn't - " Skyhawk protested, and then Loststar looked at him through narrowed eyes, sinking her claws into the ground deep enough to leave permanent marks.

"You're exiled, Skyhawk," she snapped. "Go! Before I make you!"

"I swear I didn't - "

"GO!"

"You heard Loststar, Skyhawk!" Berryfrost spat at him. "You heard her! She said go! You may be as tiny as a kit, but you're not deaf, I know that for sure!" she hissed through clenched teeth.

Skyhawk studied them one more time. He could see Honeypaw in the midst of the crowd - doing nothing, saying nothing, and clearly quite content with doing nothing by the bored, vague look on her face. Defeated, Skyhawk raced out of MapleClan camp with insults being thrown at him second, after second, after second ...

Chapter Thirteen (FINAL)

Skyhawk ran out of camp with insults being thrown at him the whole way, with the most audible and sick insults belonging to Berryfrost. He shook his head and slowing down his pace once he spotted the waterfall in clear view. His tail lashed and soon he reached a complete stop.

Tired, Skyhawk stopped to take a few sips from the fresh water of the pond formed below the waterfall that MapleClan was known for. As he was drinking, he heard some peculiar splashing sounds and lifted his head, ears perked. Soon he saw a small, silver, gilled head poke up from the water. The beady black eye adorned on it's face saw Skyhawk, but it quickly vanished back under, and popped up again seconds later, even closer. Skyhawk was intrigued, then snapped out of it.

Skyhawk unsheathed his claws and brought them down on the fish once it was close enough, and the fish sunk back under, liquid staining the water red. Skyhawk stretched forwards and stuck his paw in the water, pulling the dead fish out of the water with ease and then setting it down next to him. He grasped the fish in his jaws when he heard bushes

rustling, and he took off running, afraid that it might be a MapleClan patrol or even a predator, despite that MapleClan territory didn't have much predators come by. That would be WolfClan, hence the name. MeadowClan attracted the most prey, because they lived in a meadow and, as expected, many creatures would love to live in a pretty little meadow.

Skyhawk soon became lost in the midst of unknown territory. He didn't scent any familiar cats. As a matter of fact, he smelt no smells of cats at all. With a sigh, he flicked his ears and started walking through the forest. And soon a tangy scent hit his nose, that smelt like freshly-made dirt.

Skyhawk couldn't help but wonder where he was when he scented

twolegs and other creatures unbeknownst to him. Finally, he found a strange structure of a twolegplace made out of the wood from trees with, oddly, no crazy twoleg color added to it. Skyhawk blinked and came closer just to see that huge animals with short fur but long hair streaming down their necks and their tails fashioned into something weird shared the building, while fat white or black animals with black or brown spots grazed in a meadow that was fenced in by even more wood. Far beyond the spotted creatures were another fenced-in animal that was pink and streaked with dirt and had an ugly nose on it's face. Then there was another wooden coop, far less complex than the maned animals' building, that belonged to multi-colored animals that looked remotely like birds but were poor fliers.

Skyhawk was intrigued. He watched on for a few minutes, before approaching the first structure that he had seen. He padded towards the first animal he saw, a rather pretty one that was white with a cinnamon-speckled flank, brown feet and a dark brown mane + tail. He jumped on top of the wood that closed the horse inside the rather small area compared to the size of this horse. "Psst," he whispered, but had no idea if the creature could hear him, nonetheless understand what he was saying.

Skyhawk soon came to recognize the creature as a horse. Her large black eyes twinkled. "Why, you're at Frosty Winters Ranch, of course! And who are you?"

"I'm Skyhawk, and you?"

"I'm Caramel Apple. These horses behind me are Elvira, Tuscani, Shimmering Dawn, Rosa, Stryker, my mate, Dust in The Wind, and my very own foal, Grayson, who is in here with me." She motioned down to a small, silvery body with dark gray streaks and a dark gray "mask."

The small silver body looked up at Skyhawk from where he was perched at on the wooden stall, and then he stood up to his full height. "Hi!" Grayson chirped, and his mother smiled kindly down at him.

"So what are you doing here? The only kind of cat we have here is a

barn cat, who hunt the rats and the mice in the barn, and you certainly don't look like a barn cat." Caramel Apple pointed out, and Skyhawk couldn't help but feel offended. Of course he didn't want to be a barn cat, but he was sure that the secret message of Caramel Apple's statement was that she thought he was a "little bit small."

Skyhawk sighed. "Well, I'm not a barn cat, for one thing, and I really don't want to be one, either, Caramel. I'm a Clan cat, actually, of MapleClan ... Or, I was ... Anyway ..." He said, and Caramel Apple looked at him like he was stupid. Which he might as well be, because why would a horse know what a Clan is?

"I'm sorry, but what, exactly, is a Clan?" Caramel Apple asked, and Skyhawk sighed once more, exasperated and annoyed with this large horse.

"A Clan is basically a large group of cats that live in the wild. They have their own hierarchy. At the top there is the leader, and at the bottom is the smallest kit. There are also Warriors, that hunt and protect the Clan from rivals, twolegs, and predators that could hurt us. Then there are apprentices, or, the younger cats in training to become a warrior or a medicine cat. A medicine cat is closest to our ancestors, who are also known as StarClan, and they help to take care of the Clan and heal the sick or injured cats. The deputy is the leader's second-in-command. They order out border and hunting patrols in the morning and late in the afternoon, before night. Then there are elders, those who are too old or too frail to protect the Clan anymore. They are highly respected and all apprentices must hunt for them before eating. Queens are next, and they are the mothers of the Clan or those who are pregnant. After that is the kits, and they are young cats under six moons old."

"Oh. So it's kind of like a horse herd, but ... Um, with cats?"

"I don't know what you horses do in a horse herd, so I can't exactly answer that. Anyway, they might be remotely similar if not for the fact that a Clan has cats and apparently a herd has horses." Skyhawk stated.

Caramel Apple sighed and flicked her ears, while Grayson snorted from below her and had his ears pinned back against his head. His

fluffy tail was swishing and "wagging" like a dog's would when it was excited. "Well, I suppose you must get back to your Clan then, yes?" the horse clearly didn't want to speak anymore. Skyhawk sighed, even though he didn't have a Clan anymore.

Skyhawk jumped off the edge of the two horse's stall and left the area, or the ranch, so to speak. He pondered on where the forest might be at, since, well, quite frankly, he had to admit that he was lost and probably would be lost from the four Clan's forest for quite awhile. He sucked in a breath whenever he started smelling MeadowClan scents. But why did he have to scent MeadowClan, of all Clans? Why couldn't it have been CloudClan, or WolfClan? Or even MapleClan. He knew that MeadowClan wasn't exactly the friendliest Clan, especially whenever it came to random cats wondering around on their territory.

Skyhawk tried to find their scent markers, that must be around there somewhere if he could scent the fresh scent of MeadowClan cats. He looked up at the sky for a while, and then looked down at his paws as he walked. He must've stepped on a twig, because soon a whole patrol of MeadowClan Warriors popped out of the bushes. "What are you doing on our territory?" one of them hissed. A ginger tom with green eyes and sandy-colored ears.

"Calm down, Sandears," the largest one hissed, a white she-cat with hazel eyes and brown paws and one single stripe down her back. "This is MapleClan's medicine cat. I think they're allowed on other Clan's territories so long that they have a reason."

Skyhawk shook his head. "Actually, about that .. " he sighed. "I got banished from MapleClan for something that I didn't even do." Sandears and the she-cat glanced at each other, unsure.

"So I take it that means you want to join MeadowClan?" a small black tom asked as he popped up beside Sandears.

"Be quiet, Spiderpaw," the she-cat snapped at the apprentice. Spiderpaw rolled his eyes.

"Fine, Onestripe," Spiderpaw sighed as he sat down. This cat sort of reminded him of himself.

"Well, I don't really want to join MeadowClan. I mean, I just want to stay here until I can return home." he stated. Onestripe nodded her head in understanding.

"Well, we'll have to talk to Redstar about that first." Spiderpaw cut in, clearly eager to prove himself to the two Warriors. However, it only ended up with Onestripe glaring at him in disappointment, whereas Sandears agreed.

"He's right, Onestripe. We can't just bring Skyhawk in without Redstar's permission, you know." Sandears agreed with Spiderpaw. Onestripe flicked her ears in acknowledgement "I know. I just don't want Spiderpaw to cut me off so rudely." she blinked.

"Um, sorry, Onestripe," Spiderpaw said, cutting off Sandears this time. Skyhawk snickered. He liked this apprentice already.

Onestripe rolled her eyes before Sandears could say anything. "Come on. We need to move on towards camp before dusk."

Two sunfalls later, Redstar had decided that Skyhawk could stay in MeadowClan for as long as he needed until he felt like leaving and heading back towards his home Clan, or somewhere else. Some cats were upset about this, some were glad, and some just didn't really care. While there, Skyhawk managed to form a close bond with Spiderpaw, and an even closer bond to the medicine cat apprentice, Nightpaw - well, now she's Nightfrost.

Skyhawk could sleep in the Warrior's den, even though he wasn't one, and, sadly, never had been. However, he got to sleep in the front of the den, where the breeze would always ruffle his pelt and make him cold at night whenever he was trying to sleep. But it's fair, he supposed. He is an outsider, after all, and it's a privilege just for him to be able to stay here, nonetheless sleep in the Warrior's den.

Skyhawk woke up late that night, being awoken by seemingly nothing. He shook his head and pulled himself to his paws, silently padding out of the den and being sure not to wake up the

MeadowClan warriors. That would get him kicked out for sure.

He silently slinked out of camp, not making any more noise than was necessary.

He sat just outside of camp, but not close enough to the entrance so that anyone who looked out would be able of seeing him and coming out there.

He sighed, staring up at Silverpelt with his tail wrapped around his paws. He thought of what had happened back at MapleClan. How those kits had died because of him .. yet not because of him.

"Why would you do this to me, StarClan?" he asked the sky, but the stars did nothing in response. They just continued twinkling and brightening up the night sky like they always did.

Suddenly, the bushes rustled, and a darkly-silhouetted cat sat down next to him. Obviously, it was Nightfrost. "It wasn't their fault, Skyhawk."

"Oh really? Then whose was it?"

"Breezeflame's."

Eiplogue

Skyhawk stared at Toadleap as he sat down in the middle of StarClan, waiting, just waiting, for his former mentor to respond. "Well?" he demanded, flicking his tail and then bringing it down rough against the ground. "Why did you let this happen?"

"It's not a matter of letting it happen, Skyhawk," Toadleap insisted. "We know what's going to happen, but StarClan is helpless to stop it." he said.

"Then why didn't you let me know?! That's the least you could've done! Told me about the berries!"

"You never asked! If you want StarClan to tell, then you must ask." Toadleap pointed out.

"You expected me to ask you about a bunch of berries? Really, Toadleap? I thought StarClan cats were supposed to be smart and wise. Apparently, I was wrong. " Skyhawk sighed, shaking his head.

Toadleap had a hurt look on his face, but Skyhawk didn't feel the slightest bit guilty. "Look, Skyhawk - we are edging deeper and deeper into volatile times. It's better to be safe than sorry."

Skyhawk sighed, looking away. "I know that much, Toadleap. Couldn't you have at least told me about Breezeflame?"

"I couldn't have let you known," Toadleap admitted, looking away when Skyhawk's head snapped up.

"What's that supposed to mean?!" Skyhawk spat, feeling slightly offended by Toadleap's remark. And he didn't even know why. He just wasn't being very irrational at the moment, for some reason.

"It's just that you'd be the type of cat to go off on some kind of journey to kill Breezeflame, and it's just not your destiny to do that. It's the destiny of the unborn."

"The destiny of the unborn? You're not making any sense. How can a cat that's not even been born yet be expected to go on some great journey to kill somebody? You cant make any less sense than that," Skyhawk stated coldly, flicking an ear against the breezy winds of StarClan irritably.

"It means that the cat that will finish Breezeflame once and for all has not yet been born, Skyhawk. Now go. I've already told you more than I should have; I don't want to get into trouble with Froststar. "

Skyhawk mumbled insults under his breath as be was forced to wake up. With a sigh, he pulled himself to his paws and decided that today was the day he would return to MapleClan. He had a couple of important things to tell his mother.